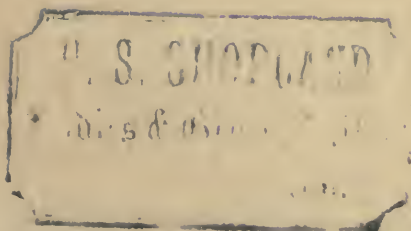


HARVEST

V·I·LONGMAN





H. S. STODLAND
Fadies & Gents Callers
LYNTON, Devon.



HARVEST

HARVEST

A NOVEL

BY

V. I. LONGMAN

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To
K. L.
MY BELOVED MOTHER

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HARVEST

CHAPTER I

GEOFFREY LATHOM was lounging in his long chair on the verandah after dinner, smoking that cigar to which men in India look forward all day. At his feet, almost, lay the jungle, breathing its own indescribable fragrance, seeming asleep, like a lover worn out with passion. Only seeming—for underneath the apparent hush Lathom's accustomed ear detected the stir of many jungle children. Little greyish squirrels fussed and fidgeted in the undergrowth, a snake was gliding through the piles of brushwood on stealthy belly, and the moon shone on its gleaming skin. Flying-foxes, tired of hanging all day head downward, were foraging abroad; monkeys sleepily renewed the day's quarrels, as they jostled one another in their overhead perch; in the distance, jackals were howling their desolate cry—that cry which seems to utter once and for all the aggregated misery of all outcast things.

Away to the left was the sea, always blue and always calm, like some great inland lake. Lathom could hear the cries of the natives on the beach, as they threw in their nets among the little placid waves, fishing by torchlight. With their discordance was blended the droning chant of the priest, from the temple on the hill above the bay—and Lathom shuddered as he

thought of the road that led to that temple. By day it was thronged with crowds of beggars, who hoped for *pice* from the devout pilgrims so nearly at their journey's end; and they were seldom disappointed. At the road's edge sat those who were unable to walk—and men whose lot has been a stay-at-home one may thank God they do not know what terrible havoc may be wrought on His likeness in the East. Here and there were the fakirs—holy men, the sanctity of whose profession made them sure of the alms of travellers, and who, therefore, did nothing to entreat them except to place their begging bowls beside them. All were naked, except for the scantiest of loin-cloths—their bodies daubed from head to foot with a greyish-white substance—and most took pains to show, in additional ways, that they had forsworn the world, the flesh and the devil. One had let his hair grow till it trailed in a thickly matted tangle for several feet in the dust, another lay stretched in the blazing sun on a bed of spikes, a third was suspended from the low-hanging bough of a tree by his feet and hands.

Lathom could not, even in memory, dissociate from the scene its intolerable sights and sounds and stench—pah! it was sickening. He was conscious of its insistence through all the scented odours of the night, and wondered, not for the first time lately, if he were getting tired of India.

As a boy, he had shown no particular talent in any direction. His father, a widower of straitened means, saw no use in putting him into the business that scarcely sufficed for himself—and there was an elder sister who might not marry. It was imperative, therefore, that he should shift for himself, and at nineteen

he had somehow found himself on a Calcutta-bound steamer, possessed of a billet in the Indian Police. In Calcutta, orders were awaiting him to proceed at once up country—and for the last sixteen years his life had shown very little change. Occasional transfers from one station to another, still more occasional increase in pay, and leave every five years. He had only availed himself of one of his three opportunities of going home. His father was dead, his sister married to a well-to-do country gentleman in Sussex—his place was filled up, and his old friendships forgotten. He was thankful when his hard-earned leave was up, and spent the next two in Kashmir.

His present billet suited him. He was D.S.P. (District Superintendent of Police) of a mofussil station near enough to Calcutta for him to feel that he had not quite lost touch with civilisation—the presence of the famous temple before referred to ensured plenty of activity among the various native pilgrims who came to “do puja” [worship] there, thereby adding a pleasurable spice of excitement to his work—and with the collector, the doctor and the doctor’s assistant, there was generally a bridge four ready to hand in the evenings. Lack of opportunity and his own natural shyness had conspired to prevent him seeing much of the women of his own station in life (Jasoda sufficed him). For the rest, he had all the riding he needed, splendid snipe-shooting in season, and a moderately comfortable bungalow furnished chiefly with his greatest friends, his books. The Rains of succeeding years had stained and wilted them, insects had eaten into them, the sun had bleached them, but he loved them the more because time had dealt un-

kindly with them. They seemed to harmonise with his frayed cuffs and soft collars—they were as dear to him as the most battered doll of a large family to the average girl child.

If he wanted exercise, he could probably get a set of tennis at the club, which was exactly like every other club in small mofussil stations, with its two thatched rooms, and its hard “pukka” tennis court. You repaired there before dinner for a smoke and a drink, and looked over the antiquated papers, or got up a rubber of bridge. If the club held no attractions, there was the golf course, which the doctor enthusiastically declared to be “in the making.” This was a nine-hole sandy stretch, tenanted by jackals, snakes and the like—full of treacherous lagoons, where your ball sank, never to rise again—but after all, it was a good walk over the links, and sunset behind the palms a magnificent sight.

Not a bad sort of life, on the whole, for a man of simple tastes, who did not fear to be alone with himself and his books, and had no home ties. Lathom’s was not a character of strong mould—he had always been prone to follow the line of least resistance. But last week’s mail had introduced an element of disquietude into his thoughts, and it was of this he was really thinking, as he smoked his cigar and pulled at the “peg” in the long glass fitted into his chair.

It seemed that a brother of his father’s, of whom he remembered vaguely to have heard, had lately died in Australia, leaving £12,000 to be equally divided between Lathom and his sister as his next-of-kin. Lathom knew very little of money, but he supposed his share would bring him in somewhere between £250

and £300 a year. The question he was asking himself now, strange as it may seem, was—did he want it? It would be of no use to him in his present way of living; his pay sufficed for his few wants, for Government gave him his bungalow—more would be an encumbrance. What awaited him if he threw up his billet and went home? There could be no one, surely, who had any business use for an Indian policeman, who had spent the last sixteen years in unheard-of mofussil stations. He could buy a cottage in the country somewhere, but that would mean beginning life all over again, without youth's enthusiasm for novelty. Who or what would take the place of his three friends and of their comfortable evenings at bridge, each knowing the others' *conventions*? There was the possibility of marriage, but he dismissed it with a frown—(there was Jasoda !). But one does not return a legacy of £6000 *declined with thanks*; what ought he to do?

After all, he had not been born an Englishman for nothing. The loveliness of English country still pulled at his heart strings—and at the moment a mental picture of his sister's home in Sussex rose before him. Thatched roofs with their blue smoke fading into a bluer distance; great bare downs rolling away behind, bestowing a magnificent sense of space; woods which gave up their secrets of flower and plant to those who looked to find; banks of wonderful violets, white and purple and rose-coloured, breathing their pure fragrance of springtime. All this vision might be his.

He remembered how, as a boy, he had watched Spring stealing along the Kentish hedgerows, while everything stood, as it were, tiptoe to hear and see her; and how beautiful the Norfolk Broads had been to him, as they

lay in summer's embrace, their marshlands ablaze with blossom. He trod once more the springy heather moors of Yorkshire, the North Sea's autumn breezes stinging his face—then it grew colder, and he skated on the ponds at Hampstead Heath, or tobogganed gaily down the slopes, in the January of a record winter.

He had not known his memories were so vivid; it was getting deuced hard to choose. He was unused to deciding any personal problems, and hated his task. Perhaps he could tell the people at home to keep the money in trust for him, so that, when he retired, he would have something to fall back on. Yet, instinctively he knew that if he did not go home now, he would not do so when he retired—a dying animal crawls into the hole he has made, not out of it. What had England done for him? Sent him away—refused him a share in those pleasures his youth would have enjoyed. He thought of gaily lighted restaurants and crowded theatres, but only to wonder that they should ever have stood to him for the flesh-pots of Egypt. He was no nearer his decision, and was half amused, half irritated, to find himself wishing that some external sign might be vouchsafed to aid him.

It was then that Jasoda came noiselessly to his side in the gathering darkness, and, taking his hand between her slim palms, crouched at his feet. "My lord is turning over many things in his mind," she said, chafing the hand she held. "Tell me I do not disturb thee, Jaffari Sahib?"

CHAPTER II

THE story of Lathom's connection with Jasoda would find many parallels in lonely stations in India, where, in spite of exile from all familiar things, a man may not forget that he is a man, and that a woman is a woman.

A year ago, when Lathom had been gripped by a *go* of fever more than usually severe, Jasoda had appeared one day in the bungalow, and quietly taken her place by his bedside. She never seemed tired—she was a nurse by instinct—and Dr Ramsay, his hands full with an outbreak of cholera in the village, was thankful to shrug his shoulders and accept the situation.

Lathom for some time was too ill to heed people or things, but one day struggling towards a tedious convalescence, he opened his eyes to wonder who this native woman might be—with her quiet movements so full of an inborn grace, and her great dark eyes, holding in their depths a mysterious look of sorrow—or was it wistfulness?

“What is your name?” he asked suddenly in Hindustani, “and why are you here?”

“Huzoor,” she had replied, “I am called Jasoda, and I came because of my lord's great need.”

“But you don't speak like the women here,” said Lathom, contrasting her accent and poetic phrasing with the harshness of the dialect he heard daily. “Where is your home, and how is it that you know me?”

“Huzoor, I am of the hill people. Seven years ago, I being then but a little maid of nine, my parents wished to do puja in the great temple here, and brought me with them. But alas! an illness seized them, and I alone was left. Then some people of the village took me in, and cared for me from then till now. And one day I looked upon the face of my lord as he walked along the shore, and knew that my life was always with his to the end, even as twin rivers run together to the sea.”

“But why have you not married some village youth, Jasoda?” broke in Lathom, feeling all an Englishman’s embarrassment at such a frank avowal.

“The people of the hills may live with the people of the plains, sahib,” was her dignified answer, “but they do not wed with them. If my lord will but let his servant stay! I know how a sahib’s dwelling-place should be kept, and how to cook his food. Huzoor, do not send me back to Goomi—the men are foul-mouthed, and are as animals, and the women go with their faces shamelessly unveiled in the public way.”

“But what will the people you live with say, Jasoda?”

“What care I, sahib? They reproach me ever that I should be come to sixteen summers and still not wed—I am a burden to them.”

After all, she was only sixteen—a mere baby. What harm could come of befriending the poor child? He owed her some return, surely, for her unflagging care of him all those weeks; it would be churlish to refuse her. He need seldom see her, and she would, no doubt, be useful. Of course he could not let her cook for him or do menial work of any kind, but she could look to his

clothes. Diba Kas, his bearer, was getting very short-sighted, poor old chap!—and he had a shrewd suspicion that his socks would be none the worse for a woman's hand at them. How lovely she looked, with the tears ready to brim over, if he said No !

This last reflection, at any rate, might have warned Lathom that the step was not as harmless as he supposed, and certainly, in his deepest consciousness, he must have been aware that Jasoda was a child in years alone. In the East all things come early to their maturity ; it is no uncommon thing for a native girl to be married at twelve, a mother at thirteen, and perhaps deserted the year after, without any means of subsistence for herself or her baby. At sixteen Jasoda was in all the beauty of young womanhood, waiting for a lover as opening flowers wait the sun's kiss. She was very good to look upon, with her supple, rounded limbs, her delicate features, and the midnight blackness of her eyes and hair. Her skin, too, had a pallor never found among the women in Goomi—partly, no doubt, because she kept her face hidden so much, drawing the folds of her saree across it in the presence of strangers.

She was as different from the type of native woman with whom Lathom was familiar as some delicate hot-house plant is unlike its sturdy field-sisters ; perhaps her greatest charm was the atmosphere of mystery and remoteness that hung about her—she seemed like some Oriental princess of faëry under a magic spell. (Lathom was something of a poet in rare moments, and it was evidently she who inspired him with the motif for a beautiful little lyric, " O Peri strayed from Paradise," which his daughter found among his papers at his death. . . .)

She had come to Lathom a year ago, and the thing had drifted to its inevitable result. Lathom was only man, and everything about the girl cried out to his senses, appealing to them in the subtlest ways. She was so alluring, so ready to be loved; yet even when she lay in his arms in passionate abandonment, she never seemed wholly his, and so he never tired of her. She soothed him when he was weary, chafing his hands or stroking his hair; her mind, too, was alert and receptive, and she learnt from him very readily. She would sing to him the songs of her own people, and he would translate them into English, and repeat them to her. In short, she held him as no other woman could have done—had she been merely sensual, with the transparent wiles and revolting brazenness of the women of Eastern cities, he would never have fallen; but she invested the whole episode with romance, and so lifted it far above the level of an everyday intrigue.

He had no one to answer to for his actions, no one to consider; his friendship with his three friends remained unaltered, they saw as much of him as they had always done—consequently, they looked upon Jasoda with that philosophy one learns to cultivate in the East, and it is even possible that in their heart of hearts they envied him.

. . . Now, as she came to him in his perplexity, and he felt the magnetism of her touch thrilling him, it seemed to him that it was really she of whom he had been thinking all the time; the choice lay, not between home and India, but between home and Jasoda. To take her to England was impracticable, well-nigh impossible—if he decided to go he must break with her at once and for ever. And, in the end, would not this

be the wiser course? In the nature of things, theirs was a connection that could not last always; if it should be merely a question of transfer to another station he could scarcely take her with him, and such a summons might come at any minute. They had had a year of happiness—now it were best to kiss and part. Life without her would be a very loveless thing though, worse than it had been before she came into his life, for then he could not know what he was missing. He was glad to feel her soft hands enclosing his rough one just then—she was his still, no dream-woman, but beautiful flesh and blood.

“You have guessed right, little one,” he said, “I have a big question to decide, and there is nothing to guide me. But I’ve thought enough for to-night—sing me something, and help me to forget it all till to-morrow.”

This was the opportunity for which Jasoda had been hoping, and she broke forthwith into a song Lathom had never heard before. Her voice had a very sweet quality, and was low and tender. Before he heard her, Lathom had thought all native music execrable; in her singing he learnt something of its evanescent beauty, which seems to elude us just when we think we have understood it. The words of Jasoda’s song, done into English, would be something like this :

“I had a garden, barren of all treasure
Till my lord walked therein and took his pleasure;
*Now is my garden blest beyond all measure.

For lo! a seed of his own gracious sowing
Is with each moon to such sweet fulness growing,
It sets my heart with love and praise o’erflowing.

And all will gaze and say : ' Though once the barest,
Her garden now must be accounted fairest,
Since of all blooms this blossom is the rarest.' "

The liquid notes died into the darkness, and there was silence on the verandah.

" That's a new one, isn't it, Jasoda? " asked Lathom at length.

" Not new, Jaffari Sahib "—this was the nearest she could get to the name he had tried to teach her. " Not new, but there was not reason to sing it before."

" And now? "

" Now there is the greatest of all reasons for the song. Cannot my lord guess? Too many moons have come and gone, and left the garden empty, and I feared that I might shame myself, and worse, shame thee. But the gods are good and have heard my prayers." Here the royal little head drooped so low that it rested on Lathom's imprisoned hand. " I know that I shall bear my lord a child."

So this was the sign ! Manlike, Lathom had thought of the possibility at the outset, and then dismissed it with thankfulness as one not likely to be realised. To his way of thinking, as long as there was no outward symbol of their union, it had no quality of permanence, and might be dissolved at will ; but a child put a very different aspect on the case. In God's sight, he would be its father, and could not evade his responsibility. What right had he to put the burden of illegitimacy on a helpless child, whose inheritance of the antagonism of East and West would surely be obstacle enough in its journey through the world? Whether it should prove to belong more to his people or to Jasoda's, in

the eyes of both races it would be an outcast, unaccepted.

What had he done? What had he done? Some devil of memory sent Kipling's words cleaving through his brain like a flash of steel. "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." He moved restlessly in his chair.

"Thou hast said nothing for a long space, sahib," whispered Jasoda. "Art thou not pleased, then, as I am?"

"Why, of course I am, child," Lathom answered hastily, "but the news was a surprise to me, and now I am thinking what is best to do for us all. I expect," he went on, to divert her thoughts from him, "that even now you have decided on the name—isn't it so?"

"Huzoor," said Jasoda seriously, "it is in my heart that the name should be Dilkhusa [Heart's Delight] if it pleased thee, to signify always our joy in the little one that is mine and thine; but it is not wise to flaunt happiness before the gods, and mayhap it were better to choose Dilgiri [Sorrow], for so the envy of the evil spirits shall be averted, and they will not hurt it."

"I don't think I can stand that, Jasoda!" replied Lathom. "It will be quite hard enough for the little beggar as it is—we'll risk the evil spirits and not handicap baby at the start. I have it! It shall be called Hasil, for that means Harvest, and it is the harvest of our love for one another, isn't it? Does that satisfy you?"

She said it did, and would have talked further of the wonderful thing that had happened, but Lathom felt he must be alone with his thoughts for a little while.

“Run away now, dear,” he said; “it is very late, and mothers with babies coming to them should be asleep long ago.”

She went obediently, and he was left to face the problem. A cigar would be inadequate, somehow, and he felt in the pocket of his old coat for his favourite pipe. It was there, and lighting it, he seemed to himself armed in some sort for what lay before him.

It was characteristic of the man that he never once thought of evading the difficulty by taking the way that chance had thrown open to him. Where some men would have seen in Jasoda's news the “Finis” of their life together, Lathom realised only that he had sown the seed and must reap the harvest, whether for good or ill. He must marry Jasoda—that much tardy reparation to his little unborn child lay in his power. He would ask his old chum, Paget, a “padre” in Calcutta, if he could spare time to come to him for a week or two—his holidays were rare, and he would probably be glad of the change. Paget would make them man and wife, and in future, Jasoda must take her position as mistress of his household.

By the way, he must tell Ramsay, and M'Alister, and Hollis; they would say he was quixotic and absurd, ruining his life for a theory, a needless sacrifice. He could hear the Scotch, excited accents of Ramsay and M'Alister, the lazy drawl of Hollis, as they argued, separately and together, that this step of his was only making bad worse—that no good could come of his declaring himself to be the father of a native baby (“black as a coal, of course, my dear Lathom”—that was Hollis), and that a moderate sum paid annually for the upkeep of mother and child would more than meet

the case. Ramsay would urge that his legacy was an unmistakable testimony of Providence's feelings in the matter; he was evidently intended to shake the dust of Goomi off his feet, and return to Britain and respectable citizenship. M'Alister, youngest of the three, would treat learnedly of the physical and mental tendencies bequeathed to his offspring; that all were undesirable, and their unfortunate possessor must inevitably come to a bad end. And then, led by Hollis, they would all take up the strain again: "But, seriously, have you thought what you're letting yourself in for, old chap?" . . . Yes, he had thought of it from every side, and with the obstinacy some people find so surprising in his type of character, he would hold to his decision.

The child should have its chance, such as it was, and all the rest must go. His legacy would be very useful in helping to meet the extra expenses that were coming—and afterwards it would provide for a good education. But that was a long way ahead. . . . In the meantime, he must put the memory of thatched roofs, and woods, and great spacious downs far from him—England was not for such as he. He had asked for a sign, and a sign had been given; he was not to see the land of his fathers. She seemed very desirable, now that absence from her was compulsory, no longer voluntary—a thousand memories came crowding in upon him. He shook them off; this would never do. He might as well write that letter to his solicitors at once; it would be off his mind. He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and went indoors.

When he came out again for a breath of air, before finally turning in, it was close on midnight. He felt

tired and worn with the stress of the last few hours, and the deep jungle-peace lay upon his spirit like dew on a parched land, soothing and refreshing him. It was a night of stars; he could just see the Southern Cross between the trees, low down upon the horizon. How would it all turn out? he asked himself, finding himself confronted by the merciless working of the law of consequences. It was as if a child, strayed into an electrician's workshop, had thoughtlessly pressed some lever, and then stood aghast at the mighty forces he had set in action.

There floated to the surface from the treasure-caves of Lathom's memory a fragment of Walt Whitman, and, as he undressed, he murmured the lines to himself, hardly knowing he did so :

" Did you guess anything lived only its moment?

The world does not so exist, no parts palpable or impalpable
so exist.

No consummation exists without being from some long previous
consummation, and that from some other,

Without the farthest conceivable one coming a bit nearer the
beginning than any."

CHAPTER III

DAYBREAK over Goomi some six months later. Lathom, haggard after a night of anxiety, pacing the beach to get away from the sights and sounds of suffering in his bungalow, had no eye for the momentarily changing glory of sky and sea.

God! Why did women suffer so? (It was the old, old question—but men ask it *after* the agony has come to the woman they love—not before.) Why Jasoda of all women? He ground his heel savagely into the soft sand, startling a land-crab, who hurried away from his impending doom with awkward, sidelong gait. Jasoda was so elemental somehow; sometimes hardly mortal, a wild, faunlike thing—why couldn't the pangs of birth have passed her by? To him their love had been less passionate than spiritual, never wholly grasped, half mystic in its quality: yet he had brought upon her the fate of any servant girl, any clerk's wife in the suburbs. Could one imagine the divine lovers of old time, Juliet, Francesca and the rest, surrounded by all the ugly associations of childbirth? Eve's children were born outside Eden, they were part of the curse.

Her anguish made him see things out of their true proportion. He forgot the beauty and the mystery of Birth; for the moment, it was merely a sordid fact, entailing a damnable amount of suffering to a woman who was sinless, unless her love for him were sin. He looked up, and saw Diba Kas hurrying down the sunny

slope that lay between his bungalow and the beach. He could not trust himself to ask news of Jasoda from his bearer, and merely waited for him to speak.

"Huzoor, the Doctor Sahib sends salaams," panted the old man breathlessly; "will you please come at once?"

Lathom reached the house before Diba Kas had gained breath for the ascent towards it, and met Ramsay outside the threshold of the room that was Jasoda's.

"She is asking for you," he said. "Will you go to her?"

"Is she strong enough yet?" asked Lathom.

Ramsay looked him in the eyes. "Old man," he said compassionately, "it will not matter."

"Not matter! Do you mean she's not going to pull through?" demanded Lathom fiercely. "Good God, Ramsay, I thought you'd had too much experience to bungle things! Why didn't you tell me you didn't know your work?"

Perhaps it was just because of Ramsay's experience that his face showed more sympathy than before, and all he said was: "Go to her now, Lathom; she's fretting."

Lathom pushed aside the purdah hanging before the door and went in. Jasoda lay among the pillows, looking very frail and young, her face framed heavily in the masses of her dark hair. From somewhere near, Lathom heard the plaintive cry of a new-born child, but in the dazed state of his brain, did not in any way connect it with Jasoda.

She recognised him at once. "Jaffari Sahib," she said weakly, her eyes shining as they always did when

they lighted on him, "I have not displeased thee?"

"How could you, my dear one? What do you mean?" replied Lathom huskily.

"Have they not told thee, then? It is a girl, and I prayed the gods that I might give my lord a son. And now I shall not be with thee, and all the trouble of her rearing will be on thy shoulders."

"Jasoda, the little one will be all I have of comfort, if you go away from me."

She smiled then, assured that the baby girl was welcome, and lay for some time with her hand in his.

"She will be of thy race, beloved?" she roused herself to ask him at length. "I am thy wife, and thou wilt not leave her to the people here, of whom thou knowest I was never one?"

"She shall be as the English mem-lôg, Jasoda, and her name shall be Hasil, as we said together—for she is fruit of your love and mine."

He stooped and took her in his arms, and Dr Ramsay, coming in a few minutes later, found them so.

"Hush, man, for goodness' sake!" whispered Lathom. "You'll disturb her." But Ramsay knew that he would not, and gently drew the sheet over the girlish face.

In after years, Lathom never thought of that day without hearing three sounds that detached themselves from their surroundings, and forced themselves in upon his brain with startling distinctness—he had heard them then, as he sat among his books, staring out across the sea. There was the maddening call of the brainfever bird, repeated with monotonous persistence

from a tree in the compound—the wailing of Jasoda's old ayah rocking herself to and fro on the matting outside the room where her mistress lay—and faintest of all, hardly discernible, the feeble cry of a new-born infant.

When Hasil was five years old, her father was transferred to Calcutta. She had grown into a handsome, intelligent child, betraying no very apparent hint of the native strain in her. She was very dark, of course, but so are many English children; and she shared with many a child of pure European blood in Calcutta her olive complexion, and her ability to converse with equal fluency in either Hindustani or English.

At first Calcutta fascinated her. It was so big, there was so much to do, so many people, such an endless number of delightful surprises. She liked playing on the Maidan, with all the other children and their ayahs, hearing quaint Indian fairy stories, or watching the memsahibs, in the cool of the evening, as they drove citywards, in motor or “fitton-gharri” or “tum-tum,” to fetch their husbands from office. She had, too—joy of joys!—a pony of her own, on whose back she took solemn constitutionals in the early morning, Jochabed and the syce bringing up the rear. Jochabed was her English-speaking ayah, a native Christian, who would have gladly laid down her life for her “baba.”

But when the first glamour had worn off, Hasil began to think she preferred Goomi. There they had their very own bungalow, and a compound bright with flowers of Dadlum's rearing—here they lived in a boarding-house, and there were heaps of other people living there too. Dadlums was busier now: he hardly ever had

time to go walks with her except on Sundays, or to talk to her, except to say : " Now be very good, Hasil, and don't give Jochabed any ' dikh ' " [worry].

(As if Jochabed minded " dikh " ! On one occasion when Hasil had been her naughtiest, Jocca had indulged in a vague threat of " put-put " [slapping] and that had been her trump card.) Once, indeed, Dadlums took her to the Zoo at Alipore—a fairy world of strange creatures and gaily plumaged birds, where was an uncouth monster her father called a " baby hippo," who splashed heavily in a small tank, and had an enormous mouth that took little account of huge bunches of " kēlas " [Indian bananas]. It was here that Lathom first noticed her passion for colour : to the end of her life it meant more to her than form.

Another time, she went with him on a fascinating journey up the Hugli to a place with an unpronounceable name, and saw the heavy barges drifting downstream with their burden of dried " paddy "—the quaint native craft scuttling away from the wash of their launch—and on the bank the deserted palace of the King of Oudh—but afterwards she remembered the smooth emerald velvet of the rice-fields, and how the jute stems were orange-coloured towards their roots. . . .

Her mind was awake, and asking for food. She drank in eagerly all that her father could tell her of the things they passed on their journey. He had the knack of putting his information into a form most easily acceptable to a childish palate, and she, in her turn, had her mother's receptivity and seeking intelligence.

At the end of September, after four dreary months of Rains, Hasil was heavy-eyed and irritable; she was always peevish and fretful, and tried her faithful Jocca's

patience to the utmost. As the cold weather came on she revived and became more her old self, but she did not sleep well at night and was restless all day. Luckily, Lathom's work was no longer strange to him, and consequently he had more time to spare for his baby. It occurred to him one day that she wanted teaching; it was because her brain was alert and unsatisfied that she was no longer content with her dolls and was tired even of her pony. On his way home that evening he bought a box of lettered bricks, and next morning Hasil began the strange study of the alphabet. She took to it as a duck to the water, and it was all her father could do to prevent her giving too much time to this new game. In a very short time she had mastered her letters and was learning to read.

Presently "story-telling" was instituted. Her appetite was insatiable, and she would clamour for "just one more" when, in Jocca's opinion, she ought to have been in bed asleep, instead of wide awake, with those flushed cheeks, and bright eyes, and tumbled hair. Lathom had no knowledge of the ordinary stock of fairy tales, dear to most nurseries, but neither had Hasil, and she never thought of questioning the beauty of that wonder-world of which Dadlums kept the key. In this way she acquired a real intimacy with most of the old Greek myths, and revelled in the wanderings of Ulysses, and the adventures of Jason and Æneas. To her these heroes of old time were no mere names, she knew them as she knew her father and Jochabed. Had not *she* just tossed the ball to Nausicaa when she caught sight of Ulysses, all weary and stained with his sea-peril, and so fled affrighted, leaving her mistress to confront him alone? Or she wandered through the pale

meadows of Hades with her hand in Eurydice's, wondering if Orpheus would ever come.

When his Greek lore was exhausted, Lathom told her the lovely old French story of Aucassin and Nicolette, the faithful lovers, and other reminiscences of his untrained reading. But at length his common-sense told him that there must be an end of tale-making—Hasil's mind must be taught to grip solid fact. The stories were forthwith exchanged for history. But Hasil hardly noticed the difference. Instead of the Trojan War, there were the quarrels of the houses of Lancaster and York; while Henry the Fifth was, as a matter of fact—but she did not acknowledge this to Dadlums—a more satisfactory idol than the *pious* Æneas. She had a most retentive memory, and never forgot a fact that had once appealed to her imagination. About this time her father gave her some of the "Lays of Ancient Rome" to learn by heart. It was a sheer delight to her, and she would repeat over and over again to herself her two favourite lines :

"Where rowed Massilia's triremes,
Heavy with fair-haired slaves. . . ."

"I can see them, Dadlums, I can see them!" she would cry excitedly. "Each ship's got three decks full of slaves—and they're so tired and hot, but they daren't stop rowing because of the overseer. There's one quite young—not much older than me, I should think—and he's crying because he's thinking of his home and sisters and brothers. And there's an old white-haired man! He isn't crying, but he can hardly move the oar, it's so heavy—he'll die soon. And all

the time the sky and the sea are so blue, and the sun is shining. Isn't it *wicked*, Dadlums? "

She stamped her foot, and there were actually tears in her big dark eyes—so like Jasoda's in their expression sometimes!—as she visualised Macaulay's lines.

On the other hand, she was disappointingly slow to grasp facts that, as far as she was concerned, seemed facts and nothing more. As a baby of six she had learnt the numbers up to ten in one lesson, but then Lathom had taught her with the *pips* of playing cards, and she always saw them thus. Five was never merely "five"; it was the five of hearts to her, five soft, warm,

* *

glowing hearts arranged so * Diamonds were cornery

* *

and hard, clubs were knobbly and spades were dull, but hearts were dear and delightful; their king, queen and knave each had a personality of their own, and she thought it most unjust that Dadlums wouldn't let them have numbers too.

The pitfalls of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division she escaped as long as it was a matter of schoolboys and apples, or memsahibs shopping in the bazaar; but as soon as arithmetic meant only a process by which long rows of figures had to be quite unnecessarily changed by other long rows, she became unintelligent and almost sullen. Mathematics had never been Lathom's strong point either, and as he hated to thwart his little daughter in any way, it soon befell that this study—certainly one of the most important factors in the education of a nature totally undisciplined and undeveloped!—became at first shirked, and then altogether omitted.

She was so delightful to teach when her interest was engaged ! Languages were easy to her ; she picked up a good working knowledge of French, some Latin and actually a little Greek in the years between five and fifteen. Grammar she knew by instinct rather than education, because she had never read anything but the best literature ; her geography was sketchy ; and of needlework, music and drawing, the accomplishments that are supposed to belong to a " young lady " almost by virtue of her birth and breeding, she had no knowledge at all. Jocca's skill with the needle was limited, and what little she had she had never been able to impart to Hasil ; the child hated sitting still, unless she had a book in her hand. As for art, her father possessed only two pictures, and Hasil knew every line in them, supplying them in her imagination with the colours they lacked. They were fairly good photo-gravures of Botticelli's " Venus " and his " Spring," and possibly influenced Hasil's artistic development more profoundly and more truly than a multitude of inferior pictures might have done. Of music her father knew nothing : the only music she heard was that of the organ in the cathedral at evensong on Sundays. It sometimes thrilled her through, and sometimes left her cold, but always she thought of the sound in terms of colour—now it was orange, now scarlet, but most often a deep, royal purple.

And all the time she was reading. She had the run of her father's heterogeneous collection, and a curious one it was for a child of her age. She read impossible French novels, laboriously looking up the words (but, by the grace of God, seldom finding them) in an old-fashioned dictionary of Lathom's ; these she mercifully

abandoned as uninteresting before she at all grasped their meaning. She found "Don Quixote" and read it side by side with "The Pilgrim's Progress"—passing later to a more systematic study of the great Victorians. She adored the Brontës, and George Eliot and Scott, but thought Jane Austen and Dickens dull and rather stupid; and, rather strangely, Thackeray did not appeal to her till much later.

In poetry, she dipped into the Elizabethans, and delighted in that "wave of genuine Helicon" almost as much as Keats had done. Shakespeare she had known and loved very early, but, even when her taste had been trained and perfected, and she had learnt to criticise, Marlowe claimed her fullest worship. *Hero and Leander*, wonderful passages in *Tamburlaine* and much of *Dr Faustus* kindled and inflamed her imagination, child as she was: she startled Lathom very considerably in her twelfth year by exclaiming to him one day, as they drove down the Strand Road, watching the sun set over the Hugli in banks of crimson cloud-drift:

"See where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!"

Shelley, a younger Marlowe, pressed him hard, but at this time remained a good second. Wordsworth she found intolerable, but she liked what she could understand of Browning, and thought Byron a very king of poetry.

Lack of discipline, together with her love of colour and imagery, and her dramatic instinct, might have done her more harm than they did, had it not been for the breadth of her reading, and an embryonic sense of humour. She was still a mere child at heart, and at

fourteen took just as much delight in playing off practical jokes on those pronest and most unsuspecting of victims, Dadlums and Jocca, as she had done at five. Her joy when the absentminded Lathom lighted a spill with the matches to look for those same matches knew no bounds, and she spent long hours devising plans for the downfall of both every April Fools' Day.

She did not see enough of the lives of other children to realise that hers differed in any way. Their usual question was : " Have you got up to recurring decimals yet? " and in Hasil's shame at having to confess a negative, she forgot that she might have pleaded superior attainments in other directions as a counterfoil.

At this time she was very like her father. During the passionate union of that one year her mother had had no other desire than for Lathom, scarcely a thought but for him. Hasil was, in truth, a love-child, expressing her mother's great love for her father in her likeness to him, and in the apparent absence of any Eastern traits. She had her father's brow and sensitive, finely cut features ; his, too, the faint indecision of her chin, and the artistic moulding of her forehead above the eyes. Yet in temperament, though he had had the shaping of it, she showed a passion and a fire which Lathom never possessed. It might prove her making or her undoing, but it would always redeem her path in life from that groovy mediocrity which, in spite of powers, potential and actual, had always obscured his. After all, two people had been concerned in her soul's fashioning : and if at present it seemed easier to trace the influence of the one, it was because he had had an undisputed field, and there had been none to interfere with or criticise her upbringing.

As it was, watching her ripen into girlhood, he felt sure she would be able to take her place among "the English mem-lôg," as he had promised Jasoda. She was, or seemed to be, in every respect an English child: there was not a trace in her accent of the "chi-chi" intonation so prevalent among Eurasian children, or even those of pure Europeans left overmuch to the care of natives. He felt certain he had done right in not taking her home directly Jasoda died. Ramsay had thought it a risk for her to spend the impressionable years of early childhood in India, if her father wished to eliminate all Eastern tendencies.

But Lathom had stubbornly asserted that England must mean poverty for both of them if he kept her with him—if he did not, how could he hope to mould and control her temperament as he wished? She would grow up among strangers, and those very differences he feared would become obvious by force of contrast.

God had evidently meant her to have a chance; had He not made her body white enough for the child of an Englishwoman?

So far it had been easy to answer all Hasil's questions about her mother, simply because the child, naturally, never thought of the possibility of the real truth. He had told her that her mother would never consent to be photographed, and so he had no picture of her: that she was very like Hasil herself in some ways, dark and pale. Once only had there been danger, when Hasil asked her mother's name, and he told her it was Jasoda.

"That's a native name, isn't it, Dadlums?" the child had exclaimed. He had replied: "Yes, kiddie, like yours—people who live in India often give their

children native names, it's a change from the ordinary ones." And she had asked no more questions.

So Lathom silenced his fears with his habitual "*Sufficient unto the day . . .*" philosophy. But he forgot one thing—that he himself had called his daughter Hasil, and that means Harvest.

CHAPTER IV

MR and Mrs Blackford Smith were at breakfast in the morning-room at Castle Holme. Mrs Blackford Smith, having poured out the coffee and in all other respects seen that her lord lacked nothing, was absorbed in her correspondence. Mr Blackford Smith was discussing eggs and bacon with a zeal that can only be described as English—and at the same time awaiting, with some faint show of impatience, any crumb of information from the other end of the table. He was rather a nondescript little man, sketched in browns and greys, but he strove to remedy this by assuming an overwhelming manner with all and sundry. It was his method of vindicating the ways of God to man, and declaring that, in spite of appearances, he was a man to be reckoned with.

“Selina, my dear,” he said at length, gently but firmly, “my coffee is cold.”

“Is it, James?” answered the lady thus adjured. “I’m so sorry.” And forthwith became buried anew in her letters.

It was time to show that he was Blackford Smith of Castle Holme. “My dear Selina,” remarked he, with a touch of acerbity, “would it be amiss if I ask you to favour me with any news you have received?”

She looked up, and he saw to his astonishment that her eyes were full of tears.

“James,” she said brokenly, “you remember Geof-

frey? He stayed with us that week years and years ago, just after we were married. I've sometimes thought I didn't do enough to make him happy, for I don't believe he ever came to England again. And now he's—he's dead! And I never saw it in the papers, or thought anything about him till the solicitor's letter came this morning. After all, there were only two of us, and I hadn't seen him for twenty-six years."

She looked out across the well-kept lawn that was the pride of James Blackford Smith's heart. It was a beautiful morning in April, and some late daffodils nodded a graceful greeting to her. But her eyes were too misty to see them; besides, she was back in the past of more than forty years ago, with a little boy in a sailor-suit trotting beside her. . . .

Her husband's voice broke in across her dream :

"My dear, I am so grieved for your loss. Poor fellow! Poor fellow! And what does his solicitor say, Selina?"

"That reminds me!" she exclaimed. "He encloses a letter Geoffrey said was to be sent to me at his death, and I've never opened it."

She tore open the envelope. There were some thin sheets in her brother's once well-known handwriting. (Oh, why had she not kept up the old custom of writing to him every mail?)

"SELINA DEAR [she read aloud],—It seems strange to think that when you read this I shall have shaken hands with Life—I can't realise it at all. But the doctor-man here says there's something very wrong with me and I may not last out the year—so I must get used to it.

"I shouldn't worry if it were not for Hasil. I've been out here thirty-one years, and I've had a good innings. But it grieves me to think how utterly adrift my poor kiddie will be; we've been all in all to each other. I met her mother sixteen years ago in Goomi, and Paget married us. She died the year after, when Hasil was born, but I stayed on in Goomi for five years, and then I was transferred to Calcutta.

"Will you let the child come to you, Selina? You are all I have, and I've not bothered you in the past. I can't bear to think of her among strangers. Perhaps I've been too selfish in keeping her so much to myself, but we only had each other.

"I hope she will be no trouble to you. She is clever in some ways, but I expect you will find her very backward in others. I have left her everything I have, of course, so she need be no expense to you; all you need ask yourselves is whether you and James could put up with a child at Castle Holme.

"I have left a sealed packet in my solicitor's care for Hasil—I wish her to have it on her twenty-first birthday.

"That is all, I think. I should like to have seen you and James again in your beautiful home, but I put it off too long, and now the gods have willed otherwise. In taking Hasil you will be fulfilling my heart's desire—and I think you will not refuse, dear sister of mine.

"GEOFFREY LATHOM."

The solicitor's letter briefly informed Mrs Blackford Smith that he forwarded the enclosed in accordance with his late client's instructions, and that he would be glad to hear from her at an early date, etc., etc.

There was yet a third letter from Mrs Paget, wife of the friend Geoffrey had mentioned. (Selina had heard of him during Lathom's one stay at Castle Holme.) The child was apparently staying with them in Calcutta, and would do so till Mrs Blackford Smith wrote to say whether she was to be sent to Sussex or not. In any case, her father had wished her to be sent to England—perhaps Mrs Blackford Smith would select a suitable school, in the event of not wishing to have her with them.

Dear, dear ! It was all very distressing. . . . She was so accustomed to an unruffled backwater of existence at Castle Holme that she felt terribly distressed and agitated. How thankful she was for James and his decisive ways !

“What shall I do, dear?” she said, her fine slender hands trembling a little as she laid the letters down. “After all these years—a child. . . .”

James had been walking up and down as she read poor Lathom's letter—his hands clasped behind his broad little back in what he fondly considered a statesmanlike attitude, his gold-rimmed glasses bouncing and jerking upon that portion of his chest which showed below his waistline.

Whatever might be said against the outside man, he was gentleman all through, and he had kept to himself through the years the bitterness of the knowledge that no little ones of *his* fathering would tread down the velvet turf of his lawns, or break the panes of his treasured orchid-houses. And since that was so, why not let the child of his wife's brother find a home with them? They were both getting on. . . . Only the other day, he was wishing that Selina would not doze so often

over her knitting, for then her ball of wool invariably rolled into impossible hiding-places under sofa or side-board, and he could do no less than retrieve it. To ring for a servant would have been a breach of Chivalry's laws not to be entertained for a moment; but it would be pleasant to save his back and knees by hearing an "I've found it, auntie!" in a bright young voice.

Of course they knew nothing of her mother, but Lathom was a man of fastidious taste, and it was not likely that she had been "impossible," though perhaps her people had been "nothing much." Lathom had not mentioned her name. Still, she was dead, and the child had never known her. . . . He hoped Hasil (what curious spelling! He had always seen it written Hazel, but Lathom never did things like other people) would not prove troublesome. In any case, she must bend to the gentle discipline of the household that he ruled, and if only she were tractable, she need never know that a hand of steel lay cased in the velvet glove.

By Jove! it was getting late, and he must go and see about those chickens. . . .

"Let her come, Selina, my love," was his final verdict (he was one of the last men in England to use that particular form of conjugal endearment), "she'll be company for you when I'm pottering about the place, and I shall be very glad of young eyes in the garden sometimes—those confounded green-fly escape me lately!"

So it was settled. Hasil travelled home under the care of some friends of the Pagets, and reached England about three months after the news of Lathom's

death. The child was stunned, dazed; on the shock of her father's loss had come an agonised parting with Jocca, and she felt utterly alone in the world. What had happened? She had kissed Dadlums "Good-night" as usual, and next morning there was only a wailing, incoherent Jocca. The East is necessarily relentlessly swift in putting away her dead; it seemed to Hasil there was only time to kiss a white, cold, very unfamiliar Dadlums before they took him away.

The Pagets had been very kind, but their voices seemed very far away, and all the time she spent with them like a dream. She had felt so once, long ago, when she had been ill with fever. Even on the voyage she could not wake herself up. Vaguely she had her first sight of flying-fish, with their filmy, rainbow fin-wings—one day, a school of tropical whales, spouting up columns of water some distance away. And then as they crept slowly through the Suez Canal in the heat of an Eastern day, behold! a wonderful vision of myriads of foam-tipped waves, breaking on the desert sand—of the spires and minarets of an old-world city—of slender palm-trees. Someone told her that in reality there was nothing there, only a reflection from many miles away, and the phenomenon was called mirage. She remembered it then, she had read of it. . . .

It was grey and rough off Marseilles, and she felt as if she were going to hate England. What would this strange uncle and aunt be like? Suppose they didn't really want her, and were unkind to her? Oh, *why* couldn't she have died when Dadlums did? She had never thought of life without him; it could hold no possible brightness for her in the future.

But she was not yet sixteen, and even against its own

will, youth must obey its nature and be buoyant and hopeful. She wanted to be miserable, but she could not help finding the long overland journey from Marseilles interesting, and when the P. & O. train drew in at Charing Cross, she felt almost as if she were starting on some high quest.

(As indeed she was—for the least of us, in his youth, sets out to find the Holy Grail, and if, as we journey, the shadows darken and gather round us, and we reflect that we are very foolish to leave the highway for the wilderness for nothing but a vision, and that it is a good thing for us we can get back to it again, be it remembered to our credit that, at the start, our hearts burned within us.)

Her uncle met her at the station, and they drove at once to a quiet old-fashioned hotel between Charing Cross and Victoria, where he always stayed. It was strangely peaceful among the din and hubbub roaring all round it—like an island in a stormy sea—and Hasil felt glad they were to spend the night there, and go down to Sussex on the following day.

She had very little to say that night. She was tired and shy, and Uncle James' Early Victorian manner overpowered her. He must be about the same age as Dadlums, she thought, but Dadlums had been almost like a brother or a very kind friend, with whom she felt on nearly equal terms of the deepest intimacy. Uncle James suggested a great-grandfather at the very least. The way he said, "A morsel more chicken, my dear child, you are eating nothing! I insist, I positively insist," made her feel suffocated. The room seemed close and oppressive, and the feeling

of bewildered strangeness returned with double force.

"I should like to go to bed, uncle—may I?" she said, as soon after dinner as she could. Permission being granted, she hurried to her room, where her overstrained nerves found relief in a flood of tears.

But the next morning was sunny and bright, and she was awake early, and looking from her window on her first real glimpse of London. It gave on to a square, bright just now with summer flowers, where some nurses with long-stringed bonnets were wheeling rosy babies up and down the gravelled walks between the grass plots. (Calcutta babies didn't look like that, Hasil reflected.) A bird was singing from a tree near by—a gay little ditty, of wooing and mating and a nursery of birdlings. The sun gilded the old palings of the square, and made them forget how badly they needed a coat of paint. It glorified the black tree-trunks, and even the grimy little sparrows impertinently hopping here, there and everywhere in search of food. A watercart was going its first rounds and the smell of the wet dust rose pleasantly. To her right, an army of enormous buildings towered into the sky, and showed blackly against it. What were they? Just below her a merry-eyed Italian boy was grinding out a tune. Hasil began to think better of London, and told her uncle so at breakfast.

"That's good, my dear, that's good!" he said briskly. "She's the hub of the universe—is London. Here is the throne of the greatest king in the world—God bless him!—here the port of the world's greatest river, and here the most beautiful women. That is something to be proud of, eh what? I'd have taken

you to see some of the sights, but your aunt said it would be better to bring you straight home. We'll come up for a jaunt some other time."

He was really very kind, if only he would come down from his height, and be less of an Early Victorian. In the train he provided her with books and buns, and soon after they had started fell asleep, much to her relief, with a large silk handkerchief (she wondered if he called it a bandana) over his face.

He awoke as they steamed into Horsham, and told her they were getting very near now. They flashed past Christ's Hospital (whose ugly, flamboyant buildings would surely have broken Lamb's heart), where hundreds of yellow stockings, in various degrees of yellowness, were hanging out to dry. After that through one or two villages blinking sleepily in the afternoon sun, and then a stop at a little wayside station, all hollyhock and roses.

Hasil found herself in the arms of a small, nervous-looking lady, who bore a sort of faded resemblance to Dadlums; this must be Aunt Selina. She and her uncle both seemed to be talking at once, and Hasil was borne on a stream of questions and answers into a waggonette, and thence along peaceful Sussex lanes, glowing in their radiant summer garments. They crossed a bridge over a single line at a point called—so her uncle informed her—Three Mile Ash; then over a drowsy stream, along more lanes, and past a cottage, till they turned at last into an avenue of trees.

That was Castle Holme facing them: a long, low house of mellowed red brick, with latticed, diamond-paned windows, and a beautiful wisteria festooning its purple clusters everywhere. Two Irish terriers came

bounding to meet them, disregarding her aunt's cries of "Down, Eggs! Go back, Bacon!" and on the porch steps a magnificent smoke-blue Persian cat spread herself lazily in the sun. At one side of the house was a paddock; the other side was flanked by an orchard, and Hasil could see the fruit gleaming from the trees in a way that reminded her, with a sudden stab of memory, of Botticelli's "Spring." In front of the house was the beautiful lawn, where tea was already laid out under a cedar, and at the back were the stables and various outbuildings. Beyond, the Downs; around, woods from whose green depths sounded the soft throaty "Coo-oo-oo" of the wood-pigeons; in the near distance the sea.

Castle Holme was not, in spite of its name, an imposing place, but it had a quiet, compelling charm, which gave it an air of dignity all its own, as a true gentlewoman, making no pretensions to grandeur, impresses you with that same lack. Hasil, gazing at it all, felt a quick sense of kinship, and with one of the impulsive movements that were part of her nature, turned and threw her arms round her aunt's neck.

"Auntie, I know I shall be very happy here," she cried. The pale, rather pathetic little figure in its black frock had already found its way to Mrs Blackford Smith's heart.

"I am very glad to have you, child," she replied. "You are very like what your father was at your age."

Hasil's lip trembled, and her eyes clouded, but fortunately at that moment Uncle James came bustling up to relieve the situation.

“Come, come! Selina! Hasil!” (But then and always he, and everybody else, imitating him, pronounced it as if it were spelt Hazel.) “Hawkins has sounded the tea-gong, and you know how I detest unpunctuality!”

CHAPTER V

THE next two and a half years were made up of joys and sorrows for Hasil, as for most of us in our youth; for it is only when we are no longer young that we cease pigeon-holing Time in the little partitions of our own experience.

On the whole she was very happy. Her nature loved open spaces and the chance to roam; she would have fretted and pined in a big city. The promised visit to London took place in the spring after her coming to Castle Holme. She was delighted with the sense of life there; as she said, she could hear London's heart beating day and night, throb, throb, throb. Riding on the top of a bus through crowded streets was grand; so were theatres and shops and—oh, everything. Her aunt and uncle spared no trouble—they stayed at the same little hotel in Westminster, and devoted every day to sightseeing. They “did” everything, from the Zoo to the British Museum, from the National Gallery to Hampton Court. Mr Blackford Smith's object was to infuse Hasil's spirit with a patriotic enthusiasm equal to his own, but this did not interfere with her pleasure, and she was obviously delighted with what she saw. But she was a child for whom, in all experiences, some one thing stood out beyond the rest, and meant more than them all to her. In this visit to London it was one of the tondo Botticellis in the National Gallery—she had gone to them at once, thinking of her father. The

Madonna is holding the Child in her arms ; indeed, He is at her breast, but she is not thinking of Him. She looks out and beyond—and her face is exquisitely wistful. It seems to her so long since she was a maiden among other maidens, and the spring of her face used to flash into summer at the coming of her betrothed. The birthpangs are past, and only sheer gladness should be hers—yet it is as if already something whispered that even as her Joy must be above all other women's, so shall her Pain be.

Hasil had no eyes for the lovely figures of St John and the Angel, nor even for the Babe's lovable curves and dimples. She gazed into the blue-grey eyes of the girl-Madonna, and felt as if something had been quite definitely added to her experience. But in the train Aunt Selina had said : " Are you sorry to be going back, Hasil ? " And she answered readily : " Rather not, auntie ! Londoners must feel horribly cramped and dirty sometimes." Uncle James was her crumpled rose-leaf ; there was no denying it. He meant well, but he bored her dreadfully. He managed everything on a system of his own, and Aunt Selina was useless as a partisan, because she had no identity apart from him. He insisted on breakfast at the stroke of seven every morning, to begin with. That was all very well in the summer, but what, in the winter, was the earthly use of uncomfortably consuming porridge by lamplight at least two hours before the house was warm ? He prided himself on being a " handy man," and had a little workshop where everything was always as neat as a new pin, and different kinds of nails were each kept in an empty tobacco-box, duly labelled " French Nails " or " Common Tin-tacks," as the case might be. And

all over the house were pinned up cards, whereon were inscribed, in his own faultless handwriting, guiding domestic principles in verse of his own making. Over the bed of the unfortunate cook, for instance, the following hung :

“ Cook, you must strive
To rise ere five !

The bolts and bars I drew last night
You must shoot back with morning light—
And, next task, you
Should clean the flue

Ere you prepare for breakfast, and staunch your appetite . . . ”

And so forth.

Hasil's card was a bugbear to her. Her uncle had discovered that she read in bed, and the following precept hung from her gas-bracket, and met her eye whenever she entered the room :

“ Hasil, my niece, remember what a precious gift is Sight,
And hearken to my warning—*Do not sit up late at night.*
In days to come you'll think with tears upon the words I said :
' How oft doth evil ill befall the girl who reads in bed.
Her sunken eyes, her shoulders round, the dreadful truth
betray—
The gift of health God gave her she has squandered quite
away ! ' ”

He would suddenly descend upon her to see if the abominable thing were still in its place—there was no escape. . . . Moreover, Castle Holme being an old house, there was no water laid on. Hasil, who loved water passionately, took a royal bath every morning, splashing bucketfuls over herself. For a time nothing was said, but one morning she was greeted by a card depending from the bath-taps, and bearing this legend, neatly inscribed in black and red characters :

"A bathroom is a pleasant thing, and grateful should I be
That I am living in an age of wealth and luxury.
But let me bear the thought in mind, while I my bath am
taking,
Burrows the boot-boy, pumped this up; perhaps his arm is
aching!"

There were long prayers, too, morning and evening, when the carpet wore itself into Hasil's knees, and her thoughts strayed into atheistical and profane byways. Once only did any diversion occur—when Charlotte Knollys, the smoke-blue Persian, made a stately progress across the devout backs of the servants, who were kneeling side by side in a long row at the back of the room.

After dinner her uncle would read aloud from some "improving" book. Aunt Selina had always stitched away at some dainty piece of needlework on these occasions, and Hasil was expected to do the same. She hated sewing, and usually did it very badly—reversing Penelope's method of "ofttimes unravelling by night, what she wrought by day," she frequently had to unpick in the daytime the errors of the night before. And the books her uncle chose! There was a deadly one called "The Way of a Young Man," which described the progress of a godly youth at school, at college, and finally, in his father's old-established firm in the city. How cordially she loathed George Goodlife! Her detestation led her to give a perfunctory attention to his career, for she hugged the hope of hearing of his ultimate downfall, if only in the last chapter. But he pursued his hateful "Way" in triumph to the end.

Sometimes Uncle James would want her help in the garden, and that was delightful. She would snip off the dead roses, or make a syringe-raid on green-fly, or

pull up intrusive weeds on the sacred turf—gathering all the time very useful scraps of information. Mr Blackford Smith really loved his garden, and possessed a very extensive knowledge of flowers, wild and cultivated; and if his manner was a little pedantic, his facts were none the less sound. Hasil remembered his teaching gratefully always. She owed everything she knew about flowers to him. She had, herself, a natural love of them, and about this time discovered what she secretly used to call her “poppy-passion.” Poppies affected her in an extraordinary way. Coming suddenly upon them, she would be conscious that her eyes were filling with tears—she longed to be away by herself. She experienced at the same time a warm sense of subtly sweet shame which she could not explain. She never told anyone, but she never ceased to experience the sensation when she saw poppies, or even thought of them. It was as if she and they had some delicious secret in common.

Her mornings were spent under Miss Royston’s gentle sway. Miss Royston was the Vicar’s eldest and most faded daughter, very thankful of a little help in eking out a scanty dress-allowance. In her early youth she had aspired after the Higher Learning (she still used capitals in referring to it), but her father had not approved, and her own health was not sufficiently strong. In her father’s parish, she found it more remunerative to profess herself able to teach “the usual subjects,” and reserve any mention of the Higher Learning for a sympathetic few.

She actually helped to fill some very spacious gaps in Hasil’s education, and though she did not greatly aid her mental development, she did nothing to arrest it.

Moreover, she was a lady from her head to her shabby shoes, and through to the soul of her, and she taught Hasil nothing but good.

She would sometimes stay into the afternoon, if Mrs Blackford Smith were going out and did not wish her niece to accompany her, and they would scramble up to the top of the Downs, where Miss Royston would repeat Mrs Browning in a thin, reedy mezzo, and Hasil would sit with her knees bunched up to her chin, looking across to the sea. There was a Spirit in the place (did not the villagers believe that "the fairishes" still danced there on moonlight nights?). At their feet was a dewpond, looking ever up to the sky with an eye as blue as its own; at their backs a grove of trees that whispered to each other all day long, except when the wind, their music-master, required bigger things of them.

They had come up here one afternoon in late June. Hasil was sitting silently in her favourite attitude, with "Eggs" and "Bacon" frisking round her, and wondering how, on such a glorious day, even a human could be silly enough to waste time thinking!

"Miss Royston," she said at length, "were you ever in love?" Miss Royston sat up and put her hat straight.

"No, I don't think so," she confessed. "There was a curate once . . . we used to talk poetry . . . I have sometimes thought he paid me attention. . . ."

"But I don't mean what *he* did! Have *you* ever felt——?" She did not know quite how to put it; she might be on dangerous ground.

"My dear Hasil, one does not permit oneself to fall in love with a man unless one is assured of his admiration."

"What?" cried Hasil. "I never heard anything so silly. As if you could manage your feelings like that! Why, you can't help yourself being seasick, or having headaches, and it's just the same thing."

"It is not at all the same thing," Miss Royston commented drily, "and if it were, there are people who maintain that seasickness, at any rate, is largely a matter of self-control."

"Yes; and those people would never let themselves go over anything, even being in love! It's too absurd! Why shouldn't a woman choose the man she loves, just as he chooses her?"

"One reason, I suppose, dear," said poor Miss Royston, reddening a little, "is that it is a man's function to choose—his business in life; a woman's lot is altogether a more passive one."

"But who said so?" Hasil persisted. "It seems such nonsense to me that a woman can only choose who *sha'n't* be the father of her children, and not always that! A woman's work in the world matters awfully; she's got the making of citizens for the state, and she surely ought to be able to choose the man she considers best fitted to help her to do it?"

"You see, Hasil, the husband is the head of the wife, not the wife of the husband."

"So he can be, when he *is* her husband. She'll only choose a man she can reverence and obey. When she's found him, of course she treats him with all honour. Why, I'd follow the man I'd chosen to the end of the world! If I couldn't be his wife, I'd be his page—I'd sleep outside the door of his tent—I'd let him do whatever he liked with me. Once I knew he was my man, I should have to go to him."

Her cheeks and eyes were blazing. She spoke in a low, concentrated voice, plucking nervously at the grass blades.

"Hasil, Hasil! think what you're saying, dear!" Miss Royston was really uneasy. "It isn't womanly to talk like that."

Hasil turned on her hotly. "Womanly!" she said, "do you think it's womanly to talk as if you were an automatic machine? The man comes up and drops in his penny—and, unless you hate him, you give him exactly one pennyworth of feeling back! What's the good of being able to feel, if you've got to wait for someone else to wind you up?"

"I really can't discuss it any further, Hasil," said Miss Royston, with unusual severity. "If you think it over quietly, you will see that you have been talking very wildly. Emotions were given us to control—where would human nature be if we all obeyed our instinct?"

It was on the tip of Hasil's tongue to answer, "A good deal better off than it is now," but her sensitive conscience told her she had vexed her friend. "Don't be cross with me, you dear old thing," she said, putting her arm in hers. "I know I talk an awful lot of rubbish sometimes."

Miss Royston readily accepted the olive-branch, and the conversation drifted into other channels.

But Hasil was fast developing; already the childish gawkinsness was giving place to a supple un-English grace of form and movement. Her mind had hitherto always been in advance of her body—now her body was catching up her mind, and both were progressing towards full maturity. She became more self-conscious,

blushed often without cause, to her own great annoyance, and liked being by herself. Blindly, unknowingly, like the unborn child's first stirrings, her personality was stretching out groping hands for a mate; but she only wondered at her restlessness, her growing impatience of Uncle James and his finnickier ways. Even Aunt Selina's neutrality irritated her.

She was seventeen, and Dadlums and Uncle James were all she knew actually of men. (Unless you were to count the Vicar and the Doctor, but mere smells represented them best to her—the one, church dust with a vague suggestion of incense and flowers; the other, iodoform pure and simple.) But in her books they were to be met with in plenty. Her ideal Man at this time was not too young (of course), but not old enough for the years to have dulled at all his clear-cut features—with the beauty of Romeo, the melancholy of Alastor, the courage and passion of Leander, and his whole being informed with that fascinating sternness and authoritative bearing which is the special property of the Charlotte Brontë heroes.

Outwardly she was the same as she had always been: "too impatient of restraint"—according to Uncle James—"and with a lamentable incapacity for adapting herself to the study of those matters wherein she was most deficient," but withal very lovable and spontaneous.

Her most real existence was in a world of her own, where she and the ideal Man lived together, benefiting mankind. There was nothing unhealthy about her thoughts, except in their present domination of her; her lover and she, a second Prometheus and Asia, were to make the world holier and better. They were com-

pletely at one. She was alternately his mistress and his slave, at one moment playfully exacting, at another low at his feet. She would have been puzzled if you had asked her how he was dressed; certainly not in the conventional garb, which England prescribes for her sons. Nor would the services she longed to render him have been of much use to the average Englishman. Tired of queening it, she would sometimes delight to be his cup-bearer, standing beside his chair. When the day was hot, and he wished to meditate, undisturbed, she would fan him with a palm-leaf untiringly, as she had seen coolies do in Calcutta when there were no punkahs—or she would bring him rose-water for his hands in a golden bowl, wrought cunningly.

There seemed to be a fever of unrest in her, she could not sleep at night. Darkness, instead of bringing sleep, seemed to call her—the little night-wind breathing through the beautiful old ash-tree in front of her window, and stirring the heavy clusters of wisteria, spoke to her blood like wine—the moonlight was a lover's kiss—the stars had a message, could she but interpret it.

Always before she went to bed she would lean from her window to watch the moon making ghost-trees of the white-painted trunks in the apple orchard below.

“O God,” she found herself saying, “send him to me some day, I am not impatient; there are heaps of things I want to do first, and I don't feel ready for him yet. But give me some sign that he is waiting for me as I for him—that he will come into my life, and that I sha'n't miss knowing the greatness of great love. I won't mind suffering, or disappointment, or tragedy, if its *big*, but I couldn't bear to know I had only had the

second best of life. O God, please don't let my life be mediocre and just comfortable—send me a sign. . . .”

But the wind breathed as gently as before through the branches of the ash-tree, and the moon shone as serenely on. There appeared to be nothing for it but to go to bed.

CHAPTER VI

MISS ROYSTON had a friend staying with her. This was in itself sufficiently interesting, but it was not all. At a time when, as all the village knew, the only fashionable style of doing the hair was to dress it high upon one's head, puffing it largely around the face, the new arrival parted hers defiantly down the middle, and knotted it loosely on her neck—Castle Holme had never seen anything like it. Moreover, she appeared at church in a dress of dark green art serge, embroidered with a design of oak leaves in old gold. Very nice for curtains or a tablecloth, commented Castle Holme—but a *dress* !

At midday dinner (is it necessary to state that the Blackford Smiths dined heavily in the middle of the day on Sundays?) Aunt Selina proceeded to add her mite of disapproval with regard to the curious taste in dress evinced by Miss Royston's friend. Hasil was surprised to find herself warmly championing the unknown lady. She had somehow appealed to her—she was a departure from the familiar type, and Hasil was getting tired of the inhabitants of Castle Holme. It seemed to her that they never had enough ideas to go round, and what they had were so thin, so unsatisfying. Did life really mean nothing more than a succession of calls paid and returned, a mechanical round of household tasks, an endless repetition of trivial gossip, with an occasional birth, betrothal or death by way of pick-me-up? If so,

what had the great ones of the earth meant by their message? Was their work nothing but inspired dreaming, and the real world the world of Castle Holme? A thousand times No! She knew that something lay outside, but how to get at it? The days were past since Prince Charming rescued his lady from the land of Drowsihed (she knew her fairy tales now); there was small chance of *her* lover coming to sleepy Castle Holme—you must know of a princess before you can rescue her! It was so like Aunt Selina to condemn a taste in dress not identical with hers, so thoroughly Castle-Holme-ish!

Poor Hasil's mental growing-pains were making her very irritable these days. It was well for her that the crisis was averted by Uncle James' preliminary "Ahem!" prior to his recital of Grace.

As it was Christmas week, Hasil had seen nothing of Miss Royston for some time, but on Monday morning a note arrived from the Vicarage inviting her to tea that afternoon. "I want you to meet my dear friend, Isabel Caxton," wrote Miss Royston. "She is so clever and delightful, and I know you will like her."

Hasil accepted with alacrity, and arrived at the Vicarage about four o'clock, duly escorted by Uncle James. The two friends were chatting over the fire in the early dusk, and Hasil liked the warm glint of the flames on Miss Caxton's face and hair. They were talking books, but she was mortified to find that the books themselves were unknown to her, though she had heard something of their author.

"Do you know Galsworthy's work, Miss Lathom?" said Miss Caxton, presently turning to her.

"No, I don't," Hasil answered, and found herself

blushing furiously. "Please don't call me Miss Lathom—no one ever does, and it will make me hideously shy!"

Miss Caxton laughed.

"I couldn't know, could I?" she said; "one has to be on the safe side, you know. You ought to read Galsworthy. Sophie tells me you are fond of books. I will lend you "The Country House" if you like; I have it with me. It has the most tenderly drawn sketch of a mother I know—as if Thackeray had come to life and written another book. There is no sign of the hurry and flurry of our age—its tone is as peaceful as a college quadrangle, and yet it is full of shrewd criticism and kindly insight."

Hasil was absolutely tongue-tied. "I could have *kicked* you," she said to herself later. "The first time you meet a woman worth speaking to you behave as if you had just escaped from the county asylum. Vegetate in Castle Holme all your life—it's all you're good for!"

(But it was a failing from which she was frequently doomed to suffer. In the presence of superior minds, her own would instantly claim an eager discipleship, but all her power of expression seemed to desert her, and people who had been told she was "clever" or "interesting" would go away disappointed.)

Meanwhile, Miss Caxton seemed to have noticed nothing, and was speaking of other glories in the world outside—the newly acquired Velasquez "Venus," the poems of Herbert Trench, Bernard Shaw's last play. This was what the *People Who Mattered* talked about, apparently; but she, Hasil, must be content to feed her hungry soul on the delinquencies of the Otterbury's

cook, or the Brackenridges' baby. Somehow the salt had gone out of life—why was it?

When the door closed behind her, Isabel Caxton turned to her friend.

"What an interesting little person, Sophie! But I never saw a face so dedicated to tragic uses. That child will never be happy—she isn't meant to be."

"My dear Isabel, what *do* you mean?" answered Miss Royston. "Hasil is as happy as the day is long. She loves the country, and her uncle and aunt are devoted to her. She's wonderfully quick and intelligent, too—I'm afraid I can't teach her any more. She's been quieter lately, certainly, but then she's growing up—she's almost a woman."

"Exactly, Sophie, and now she's ready for the handling of the gods. I don't fancy they'll be any too gentle, and she's badly armed; she's so desperately sensitive, isn't she? Well, perhaps it will make her more fit for heaven. 'Wer nie sein Brot imm Tränen ass,' you know."

"I don't understand German very well," Miss Royston rejoined rather feebly. Really, Isabel was a little difficult to follow sometimes. But then she was a priestess of the Higher Learning, while she, Sophie Royston, was getting rusty, no doubt. She sighed, and Isabel, with quick intuition, understood.

"Neither do I, for that matter," she said. "Carlyle has very obligingly translated it for us:

"Who never ate his bread in sorrow,
Who never spent the midnight hours
Weeping and waiting for the morrow,
He knows you not, ye Heavenly Powers!"

“ I wonder if Hasil will think all the sorrow worth while? ”

. . . Hasil herself had walked home with her cheeks burning, as they always did when she was excited.

“ Well, dear, and what is Miss Caxton like? ” said Aunt Selina from the depths of an arm-chair, laying down one of Miss Braddon’s novels.

“ Oh, auntie, she’s splendid! ” Hasil replied impulsively. “ She talked of things I’d never heard of—did you know about the new ‘ Venus ’ in the National? She’s lying on a couch with her back to you, looking into a mirror, and Miss Caxton says that the lines of her hips, and the tone of her skin against the——”

“ Hasil! ” broke in Aunt Selina, in a horrified staccato. “ Don’t you see your Uncle James is in the room? ”

Hasil did not understand at first, then as her aunt’s meaning came to her, she coloured painfully to the roots of her hair. She tried to speak, but the words would not come, and in an agony of embarrassment she turned and ran upstairs.

Alone in her sanctum, the matter seemed no clearer. What an entirely hateful place the world had grown to be, if people could accuse you of immodesty for delighting in the beauty of the human form! Yet there was something in it, for she herself knew that she was overwhelmed with shyness if Aunt Selina happened to come in when she was undressing; and though she had a hidden pleasure in the young freshness of her own body, she would have died rather than let anyone know it. Something must be wrong somewhere—but where? She thought it was because people were so secretive; and longed for an order of things which should compel

them to be frankly and fearlessly themselves, morally and physically ; as it was, their very ideas were stunted and ashamed. Was that what civilisation had done for men? It was gradually dawning upon her that she was of a different stamp from the people round her. In all the time she had been with them, she had taken nothing of their shape ; she was wild where they were tame, she did not understand them, nor they her. It was as if you were to expect a tiger to settle down and be at home with a common or garden domestic cat, by telling it they were of the same family. But that exposed the logical flaw in her reasoning—the tiger's ancestors were jungle-bred, the cat's were fireside-dwellers. She was of the same race as the people with whom she lived, their ancestors had been hers, she was of their "stock," bred in their tradition. Could her fifteen years in India have made all that difference? Surely not—Calcutta, to all intents and purposes, was as Western a city as London, and her memories of Goomi were of the vaguest. Why was it that she was a square peg in a round hole, knowing neither how to make herself round nor the hole square? It was all very puzzling.

She saw Miss Caxton in the distance once during the next few days, then a note arrived one morning at breakfast :

"Do you care to come for a wander on the Downs? Sophie has to go into Horsham with her father, and it is my last day. If you'll come, I'll call for you about an hour after you get this. Yours,
"I. C."

Mrs Blackford Smith was not wholly acquiescent, but she said nothing and the pair started off along the

winding road that brings its wayfarers very shortly to the foot of the Downs. At first they talked of trivial things, but Miss Caxton wanted to get to know the real Hasil. Personalities were to her as mountain ranges, faintly seen across a hitherto uncrossed barrier, to the explorer—she could not rest till she had discovered and named them.

“What are you going to make of your life, Hasil?” she said, as they left the road and began the ascent.

“Oh, I don’t know,” replied Hasil. “Nothing much, probably; there isn’t a great deal of scope here.”

“Isn’t there? But you’re not obliged to stay here all your life, are you?”

“No, perhaps not. It isn’t as if I had a mother or father, after all.” She spoke a trifle bitterly. “But what to do? Miss Royston is a darling, but she hasn’t really put me in the way of earning a living. And, besides, it’s not really a question of that, because I believe I shall have enough to live on after I’m twenty-one. It’s just that I’ve seen a very little, I’ve thought a very little, I’ve been taught a very little, and I’ve got a most *Oliver-Twist*-like desire for more!”

“Well, there’s college,” said Miss Caxton. “Why not try that?”

“I don’t know anything about it,” confessed Hasil, “except that there is such a place! I should love to go, if I could.”

“I can tell you a little more than that, because I had a great friend at St Frideswide’s, Oxford, and I should have gone there myself if I could have been spared at home. What would you specialise in—history, classics, mathematics, science, English literature——?”

"Literature," said Hasil promptly. "That's the only one of them all I know anything about, and I don't expect I know enough of that for Oxford."

Miss Caxton laughed merrily.

"It doesn't seem to matter how little you know when you go up," she said. "In fact, the less you know the better, I'm told. One generally spends one's early days *unlearning*, apparently, so if you're virgin soil, you don't waste any time! I should certainly take English literature if I were you. For one thing, it seems to me quite the best school; for another, I know from my friend that its dons just now—he as well as she—are exceptionally nice."

"Does one have *he-dons*?" asked Hasil. "Hurrah! it must be splendid to be taught by a man."

"Think so?" was Miss Caxton's dry rejoinder. "It depends largely on the man, I believe. But seriously, Hasil, if you think of going you ought to begin at once. How old are you—nineteen in August? That's all right. There's an entrance examination in every subject, and scholarships are awarded in order of merit. You might get one, who knows?—and anyway, it would show you how you stand in relation to other girls. The examiners report on everybody's work."

"When is it?" said Hasil. "Should I have time to work for it?" Miss Caxton's face fell. "I'm afraid it's in January—I've just remembered. That doesn't give you much of a chance, does it? Never mind, even if you don't mean to go in, write at once to the Secretary, St Frideswide's, applying for admission next October, and asking for particulars of the examination. The Oxford year begins in the

autumn, and you could work till then on the lines of the entrance examinations."

She went on to explain that the Literature School meant a three-years course of study, at the end of which you "sat" for your final examination, and on the result of that, and certain prescribed examinations in subjects such as classics and divinity, were entitled theoretically, though not legally, to the mystic letters B.A. after your name.

"But suppose you fail?" inquired Hasil at this juncture.

"You fail," said Miss Caxton, "and are not even theoretically a B.A. ! But there are four classes between you and the dread abyss, and if you cared a jot for your subject, it must be rather difficult to fail utterly after three years. . . . My friend always told me that the worst part was the *viva voce* exam. Three great beasts, full of eyes, having corrected your written papers, and knowing thoroughly, therefore, your weakness and your strength, proceed to catechise you with a view to exposing one or the other. Meanwhile your eloquent strivings are overheard not only by your fellow-victims, but by any stray passers-by whose curiosity has brought them within the precincts of Schools."

"How *grisly* ! I don't think I shall go, after all."

"Oh yes, you will. It's very well worth it, I should imagine, even if it's terrible, and it doesn't last very long."

They were at the top now, with nothing but wind-swept stretches of tussocky grass rolling away, like a sea, all round them. The cold air stung them to a delicious sense of life and action.

"My father used to say," resumed Miss Caxton, "that Oxford was the best or the worst thing that could befall a man, according to his make, but that she wrote *some* words, however few, however faint, on every soul that passed through her hands. At any rate, it seems to me that she must point the way to a wider outlook; it's the difference between being up here, and in the sleepy valleys down there. Valleys are all very well, but they're not bracing!"

The short winter afternoon was waning, and the wind seemed suddenly to have turned unkind. It was time to be going, and in sheer lightness of heart, they raced each other most of the way down.

"Thank you awfully much," said Hasil, as they said good-bye in the avenue. "Life's got quite a different look now."

"I'm so glad," said Miss Caxton. "Good-bye once more, and mind you write to me whenever you feel inclined—I want us to be friends. Meantime, make up your mind to go to Oxford—I don't hesitate to prescribe it for you!"

Hasil laughed—but the letter to the Secretary of St Frideswide's went out with the evening mail-bag.

CHAPTER VII

IN the course of a few days came the answer, stating, among other things, that Miss Hasil Lathom would be admitted in October, on condition that (unless she possessed the certificate of some equivalent examination) she first passed "Responsions."

Hasil had never been in for an examination in her life, and at first the list of subjects appalled her. But she had a moderate knowledge of Latin, and a more rudimentary smattering of Greek, and Miss Royston had taught her a little Algebra and Euclid and more arithmetic—she might just scrape through. If only she could find someone with whom to read the "set books" during the ensuing months! They were four books of Cæsar's "De Bello Gallico" and two of Plato's, the "Apology," and the "Crito"—surely she could manage them! Hers was one of those natures to whom obstacles in the road of their personal aim generally act as incentives.

Perhaps Miss Royston could help. Under seal of secrecy she was consulted, and cut the knot by suggesting her father, who was an excellent Greek and Latin scholar. She was sure he would read with Hasil three or four times a week. This proved to be the case, and everything was now ready for the attack on the citadel.

Hasil opened fire directly after breakfast.

"Must you go to the chickens at once, Uncle

James?" she said. "There's something I want to ask you."

"I am always ready to advise you, Hasil; you know that," was that gentleman's reply. "I can give you a quarter of an hour, if that will do."

"It's just this"—Hasil felt distinctly nervous now the great moment had come—"Miss Royston says she can't teach me any more. I feel there's a great deal more I want to know, and I should like to go to college."

There was silence. The newly lighted fire hissed and sputtered in the grate, and Charlotte Knollys sprang to her feet as a cinder missed her by half-an-inch.

"I think my father would have approved," went on Hasil steadily, "he thought women ought to be as cultured as men."

"Of making many books there is no end," quoted Uncle James, "'and much study is a weariness of the flesh.'"

"But, Hasil dear," Aunt Selina's gentle voice broke in simultaneously, "if women are to be as book-learned as men, who is to darn the socks and cook the dinners, or to see the servants do it?"

"There'll be lots of women left, when all those who want to have gone to college," Hasil answered. "I believe God meant us to do the thing we're most fitted for. If there weren't any colleges, I shouldn't darn socks, or cook dinners, or manage servants, because I couldn't do it anything but badly."

"We most of us do things badly, Hasil," Uncle James remarked, "until we *try* to do them well. Who are you, child, to so confidently assert the Deity's

purpose towards you? How do you presume to say what you are most fitted for?"

"I don't think He meant me to darn socks," persisted Hasil obstinately, "and I love books. I'm nearly nineteen, and I know that I hate the idea of the one, and love the idea of the other."

"Very well, Hasil, I shall say no more. Perhaps you will be good enough to give me a few particulars, so that I may judge of the material aspect of the case."

She handed him the letter, and it seemed an age to her before he carefully fitted on his glasses and began to read. Aunt Selina had abandoned the situation, as she always did, and was at work on a pair of cross-stitch slippers for her husband, filling in rows upon rows of cross-stitch under and round the head of a smirking dog, in whose mouth was a large basket of forget-me-nots.

"Yes, it seems to me you can afford it," he said at last. "It will apparently cost you a little under £100 a year for your board, lodging and tuition during the three Oxford terms. When do you wish to go?"

This was capitulating with a vengeance.

"The college year begins in October, but if you and Aunt Selina are very much against it——" began Hasil.

"Don't talk foolishly, my dear. Your aunt and I lived alone here for many years before you came to us, and if you wish to leave us, we should not dream of dissuading you. Say no more about it."

"Oh, James!" said Mrs Blackford Smith suddenly, "if Hasil wants to go to college in October, that makes it quite easy for us to shut the house up, and go abroad

for your chest; it was only because of her we couldn't decide, you know."

Hasil looked at her uncle. Was it his chest and not his magnanimity she had to thank for this concession? Then her conscience smote her. They could not decide—her aunt said; they had put her welfare before their own. She was a very selfish girl, no doubt—but she was going to Oxford. *Going to Oxford!*—to the wonderful city whose streets for her were as surely paved with gold as London's for Dick Whittington. The stars in their courses were fighting for her. Uncle James' chest, the Vicar's classics, Miss Caxton and her own little legacy—what a glorious world to live in after all! She snatched up her garden hat from a peg in the hall and went out. It was a mild January morning, the month when, in Sussex, one begins to look for (yea, and oftentimes to find) primroses along the sheltered hedgebanks. The countryside had thrown off winter's shackles, and birds were singing in the barren tree-branches.

"This is the day that the Lord hath made," shouted Hasil, startling "Eggs" and "Bacon" nearly out of their seven dog-senses; "let us rejoice and be glad in it."

But, indoors, neither of the old people spoke at first. "That is gratitude, you see, Selina," said Mr Blackford Smith, breaking the silence. "Live in the nest till you are strong enough to fly, and then leave the old birds, who sheltered and fed you, to shift for themselves."

"It's nature, dear," said the woman. "When the nest cramps your wings, you must fly. Sophie Royston says the child is really clever, and I think she ought to have a chance. Don't be hard on her, James. It is

not as if she were our own, and we have each other. . . .”

Mr Blackford Smith cleared his throat and went out, as always, to his chickens. His wife remembered that she had never rung for Hawkins to clear away the breakfast things. . . .

Hasil spent the months between February and October in a whirl of activity. It was a delightful time, for four days a week she was reading classics with the Vicar, enchanted with the grave sweetness and calm restraint of the “Apology” and “Crito.” The rest of the time was divided between “cramming” elementary mathematics and giving every other available minute to her beloved books. She had all her father’s, and it was very saddening to her to read again those passages which they had read and discussed together, made beautiful for her by his sympathetic criticism and artistic insight.

But in the future lay Oxford, the El Dorado of her dreams—rich with gold-mines of untried powers, yet unminted hopes. Besides, her father’s spirit often seemed as near to her as it had been in Calcutta. Her religion at this time was a curious medley of Christianity and Paganism. Her prayers were often in the very words Jocca had taught her in her baby years. The figure of the Christ appealed strongly to her feminine instinct and dramatic imagining. But she believed firmly in the immortality of animals, and thought that when we die, our souls and bodies become one with the beauty around us, as Shelley held. The thrush song at her window might be her father’s morning greeting to her; the deepest purple in the wisteria blossoms perhaps the glow of his love for her.

She was bored quite early with the average child's conception of heaven.

Meanwhile, she was orthodox enough to satisfy Aunt Selina and the Vicar. She had been confirmed soon after her coming to Castle Holme, and she sometimes went to Communion. But it was on its sensuous side, in its beautiful old ritual and solemn dignity that the Church of England office appealed to her. The Vicar was a scholar; a gentleman, moreover, of flawless taste. His sermons were like an album Aunt Selina had kept in her youth, consisting entirely of a selection of literary quotations to which no one could take exception. So far Hasil had been content to accept what appealed to her of the form of religion presented to her, and to ignore, as far as possible, what she disliked or did not understand. She regularly recited Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" under her breath during the Athanasian Creed. But she shelved the sheer question of Belief till, as she expressed it to herself, she had "more to go upon, for and against."

All too quickly came September, with the thought of Responsions like an angel with a flaming sword at the gate of her Eden. Mr and Mrs Blackford Smith had decided to go up with her, and for the few days the examination lasted, they would all three stay at the Randolph.

Just outside Oxford, she caught an enchanting glimpse of water and trees, and then mist-wreathed spires; the next moment they were in the long station. Hasil thought the drive from the station to the hotel horrible. There was nothing of magic about it—it lay at first through a squalid district, past marmalade shops and provision stores and tumbledown houses. In Corn-

market Street it was better, but the trams were making a terrible noise, and it was raining ; besides, the atmosphere of the place was so different from what she had expected. She did not realise until later that Oxford out of term is no more Oxford than she is in Eights Week, and was proportionately depressed at the gulf between her dreams and reality. No gowned scholars in the streets with thoughtful faces and piles of books, nothing of the dignity proper to a city of cloistered antiquity !—altogether very disappointing.

She found her Responsions papers “ So-so,” though the presence of so many young men and maidens disturbed her thoughts at first. Her seat was between, on the one side, a fiery-haired damsel whose pen devoured greedily sheet after sheet ; on the other, a jolly-looking boy of about her own age, who chewed his pen-handle, scratched his head, drew figures on his blotting-paper and, in short, did everything but write. Whenever she felt overpowered by the evidence of Redhair’s appalling knowledge, she could reflect that, at any rate, she was not as likely to fail as her right-hand neighbour.

It was over. She had arranged for the Clerk of the Schools to send her a telegram, bearing simply the fateful word “ Failed ” or “ Passed,” and there was nothing to do but wait results. Her uncle and aunt had seen some of the colleges and other notable “ sights,” and talked of the Shelley Memorial, the Ashmolean, and St Frideswide’s window. But Hasil, even in the intervals between her papers, had steadily refused to accompany them. She had thrown the dice with Fortune, but as yet they lay hidden. At least, she would not torment herself, if she failed, with a more

detailed knowledge of what she had missed ; while, if she passed, she would have three years to wander as she willed, unaccompanied by Uncle James and his often irksome comments. So, after the examination, she remained in her little bedroom at the Randolph, and for the first time in her life, put pencil to paper in a struggle for expression :

“ Oxford ! Mother of Men—
Gods and heroes and fools—
Doth not thy great heart beat
At the sound of the thousand feet
Echoing through thy Schools? . . . ”

But the gloomy thought that perhaps the feet of *one* “ fool ” had echoed through them for the last time, that morning, checked further utterance.

Followed a restless space of suspense. The simplest phenomena were omens. She could have cried on discovering that dinner’s cherrystones twice yielded “ Never,” when tested for their oracular powers, and the housemaid’s cheerful comment on the landing, “ It’s very unlucky to meet on the stairs, miss,” made her yet more certain of her doom. On the day she expected the telegram she could not keep still—from the house to the garden, from the garden back to the house again, and finally down the beech avenue to the road to meet the boy as soon as might be. The morning dragged fruitlessly away. There was boiled mutton for lunch, followed by treacle-pudding—she remembered it all her life. After lunch, to the gate again. Pacing up and down the long avenue, she made pacts with God, as the peasant girl of France vows her hair to the Virgin if her lover comes back from the sea. For the hundredth time she scanned the sharp bend in the

road for a telegraph boy on a red bicycle. There he was at last—the little beast!—pedalling casually along as if the precious message he carried were nothing but a circular. Hatless, she ran to meet him. “You’ve a telegram for me—my name’s Lathom—give it me at once,” she panted in one breath. He handed it to her wonderingly, and instinctively she walked down the road with it, tearing at the envelope as she went. She would not learn of her failure (for of course she had failed) under his stupidly inquiring eyes. The letters swam dizzily into one another, but gradually they steadied themselves, and she read: “Passed Clerk of the Schools.”

The telegraph boy rode sulkily back to the post office, balked of his expected penny, but under the shadow of a great beech-tree, which stood back from the others and effectually screened her from any chance passer-by, Hasil was crying her heart out.

That night at dinner she appeared with her hair up for the first time in her life, done in as close an imitation of Miss Caxton’s as a prentice hand could achieve. Two years ago she had wished to put it up, but her uncle and aunt had always opposed it. Now she had passed her nineteenth birthday, and must practise assiduously in the brief fortnight or so that remained before Term.

She looked very young still, in her white evening-dress, with its little square neck that did no more than hint at the graceful way her head was set on her shoulders. She was not pretty, and never would be, but her face was vivid and mobile. She might attract but few, but those few powerfully.

They all went up to London for a few days to get some of her "things," and she found time to visit once more her beloved Madonna (while Aunt Selina was paying tribute to the dentist), and still was conscious of the same charm in her.

"Are you glad I'm going to Oxford?" she whispered. "Say you are." But the blue-grey eyes, almost cold in their youthfulness, looked out beyond her, seeing only the Shadow of the Cross—and an angular female in spectacles was obviously alarmed at Hasil's moving lips.

When, rather to her surprise, Uncle James asked her what she would like for her college room, she told him at once about the Botticelli, and went with him to choose a very beautiful photograph of it.

"But, my dear child, are you sure that is what you would prefer?" he said, when he had given it to her. "I don't pretend to be a judge of these things, but surely the Child is oversized for its age, and the Mother's hands are so odd. I saw a modern one the other day, which struck me as infinitely better."

But she assured him that no other could have pleased her so well.

The days trod close on one another's heels, and it had come to the last. Her boxes were all packed, and nothing remained to do but to say good-bye. The day before she had climbed to the old haunt on the Downs, and had visited her favourite nooks in Castle Holme itself. She had taken leave of Miss Royston, hugged the wet noses of "Eggs" and "Bacon," and stroked Charlotte Knollys' fur the wrong way—farewells were hateful things! With eyes that were not quite clear, she climbed into the waggonette—Aunt Selina and Uncle James were coming with her to the station.

Through the beautiful autumn lanes for the last time, perhaps; in any case, she would be different when she came back. The Blackford Smiths were going abroad almost at once—Hasil might join them or not, as she pleased, for Christmas, but Castle Holme would remain shut up till summer.

She was squeezing Aunt Selina's hand all the way. Now that she was leaving them, all memory of friction and vexation disappeared. She could only think of their kindness and generosity, only remember that they were all the kith and kin she knew. Aunt Selina had come into her room five times in one night in winter because she had a feverish cold; Uncle James had fetched her from the Vicarage in rain and slush, in spite of his chest, rather than let a maid come for her. There was a big lump in her throat, and she couldn't think of anything interesting to say. She was glad when it was over, and they were nothing more than handkerchief-waving specks on the little platform.

At Oxford everything was bustle and confusion. All the cabs seemed to have been booked by young gentlemen in very loud waistcoats, with voices to match. It was quite a long time before she found herself at St Frideswide's, after a journey through back streets.

She was shown straight into the Principal's office for a preliminary interview, and when it was over was unable to decide whether she liked her or not. She certainly had a fine presence, and a commanding air, but her manner seemed more purely social than Hasil approved. It was only afterwards that she came to recognise the great wisdom of an insistence on social claims in a college community, and was privileged to see something of the Principal's nobility of character.

Miss Ranmore never laid stress on the desirability of a life of sheer intellect.

"It is just the really clever, highly cultured woman," she would say, "whose duty it is to marry and become a wife and mother. Her college training, so far from unfitting her for those high duties, ought to render her pre-eminently capable. She has been taught to think and act for herself for three years; she is not worthy of Oxford if she fail in her after-life in the world."

Her tact reconciled all differences, and united all factions; she was the keystone of a building exhibiting every known style of architecture. But Hasil only discovered this gradually, and for the moment found the Principal disappointing.

Her room, too, depressed her somewhat. Could she possibly spend three college years in it? (She forgot what ideal dwelling-places the monkish cells of the poor scholars of the Middle Ages had seemed to her.) It was much too small for a bed-sitting-room, and how on earth could you call up lofty thoughts, fronted all day by your bed and your washstand? There was a small, clothless, deal-topped table, covered with her predecessor's ink—there was a wooden bookshelf set on the top of a chest of drawers—a wardrobe that apparently did not shut—four walls patchily distempered in green, with a carpet that by no means harmonised with those walls.

At this point in her observations, there sounded a most horrible discordance—evidently the dressing bell. She had no idea what she ought to wear, and chose at last a lace blouse and white skirt as being fairly appropriate in any event.

She discovered, on reaching the junior common room,

where some fifty students were assembled, waiting, that it really did not matter. Some wore flannel shirts with stiff, white collars, having arrived too late to change at all, and only a very few were elaborate in dinner toilettes. Presently there was a rustle and a stir—they were going in to dinner. The Principal led the way and evidently the dons followed, each with her partner. Good gracious, would she have to go in alone? No! a pretty, rather pert-faced girl came up to her, offering her arm. They were making their way to one of the smaller tables, but the Principal called: "Will you sit here, Miss Maclean?"—and Hasil saw with horror that her companion was making for the "High" among the dons, with the Principal at the head.

"That's the worst of taking in a fresher," observed Miss Maclean, as she unfolded her table-napkin. "The Principal believes in teaching the young idea how to shoot as early as possible."

Under cover of the general hubbub, Hasil learnt a few names.

"Which is *my* don?" was one of the first questions.

"Don't know your 'shop," retorted Miss Maclean briefly.

"My——? Oh! literature," Hasil replied, a light breaking in upon her.

"Is it? Mine's history. You'll have Miss Fairbank, she's sitting next but one to the Principal, wearing that funny cameo thing."

Hasil looked, and saw a rather short, plump little woman, somewhere about thirty, with curly dark hair and rather weary-looking eyes. But she seemed merry enough; her sallies were keeping those of the "High" who were near in fits of laughter.

"She looks awfully jolly," commented Hasil, "so nice and young too."

"Looks are deceptive sometimes," was Miss Maclean's rather grim answer; "she's a *terror* for work! Writes awfully clever books on the Shakespeare sonnets and that sort of thing. And it isn't as if she were content with o'er-informing her own tenement of clay, I can tell you. There isn't a woman in England who can make a silk purse out of a sow's ear as she can; it's like putting in puppy-dog and bringing out sausage."

But to her disappointment Hasil did not smile; she was busy examining the faces of the other dons.

"Who's that fair, fluffy one," she said presently, "with the kind smile?"

"That's mine, Miss Goldney, and she is rather a darling. Not a bit clever though. Don't know why they had her here. But she's comforting if you are ill. She *loves* you to have a headache or something, and if you have a secret sorrow, she positively gloats over you. I found she was losing interest in me because I was always so fit, so I told her my people at home misunderstood me, and were entirely out of sympathy with my longing for a career. We talk about it now most of my coaching time, and she is really very satisfactory. Just before dinner she was asking me if I thought it wise to sleep in the garden when I coughed twice in the lecture yesterday."

"You sleep in the garden?" exclaimed Hasil.
"What's it like?"

"My child, it's scrumptious! One spreads one's humble pallet upon eight chairs, for the baffling of cats and beetles (unless you're lucky enough to own a

camp-bed or a hammock), and sleeps like a blessed infant 'under the canopy,' as Coriolanus hath it."

"It would be very much nicer than in my room anyway," Hasil reflected.

"Why? Where's your room and what's the matter with it?" Hasil told her.

"Cheer up," said Miss Maclean, "it's your fresher ignorance, that's all. I'm going out to cocoa to-night, so I can't help you; but after cathedral to-morrow morning I'll drop in and show you how it's done. You unpack your books and things and start your diary."

"Diary? . . ."

"Oh, don't tell me—every fresher keeps a diary. I've got mine still, with 'Came up to-day' against the first day of my first term, and nary a blessed minute ever since to write another word!"

"How long have you been up, then?" ventured Hasil.

"This is my second year, the best year of all. Clean of the eggshell-bits of fresherdom, not yet shadowed by the black clouds of Schools, ripping all through! By the way, you'll have to mind your P's and Q's in your treatment of Us. We are easily offended."

"Well, I never——" Hasil was beginning hotly, but checked herself at the thought that in the first place Miss Maclean might be joking, in the second that the lady herself must have gone through the mill once, and not so very long ago.

She learnt a few more dons and students, each labelled in Miss Maclean's inimitably racy style, and then the Principal gave the signal, and they all filed into the junior common room for coffee. Presently people began to disappear, and Hasil went back to her

room. Someone had put a match to the fire, and everything looked more cheerful. She partly unpacked, and when she had hung her Botticelli above the mantelpiece, ranged her books along the shelves, and put out her father's photograph, she was half in love with the little place already. Coming across her diary, she remembered Miss Maclean, and defiantly inscribed under the date, 14th October: "I become a citizen of no mean city." That done, she switched off the light, and luxuriously enjoyed the totally new experience of undressing by firelight.

Sleep was a long time coming. The Oxford bells told the quarters to one another all night long, deep voice calling unto deep—her bed was hard, and the tree shadows outside danced wildly across the ceiling—besides, she was unused to a fire in her room, and it chattered and gurgled like a live thing. It was just before daylight when she finally dozed off, to dream that she was confiding to Miss Goldney the symptoms of some terrible and entirely fictitious malady, while Miss Maclean made faces at her in the background.

CHAPTER VIII

At breakfast next morning she found herself seated next to a girl whose face had attracted her the night before. It was a very noble face, with a profile almost Greek in its purity. The brow was low and broad, with the soft hair rippling back from it and almost concealing the ears—the eyes blue and dark-lashed, the nose aquiline, the mouth really beautiful, strong yet intensely sensitive. Hasil's love of the beautiful drew her eyes again and again to the face beside her—but she did not like to speak, in case this was a senior who might resent liberties. At last the girl herself broke the ice, following up a request for marmalade.

“Do you mind me asking you your year?” she said.

“Oh, I'm a fresher,” Hasil replied, glad to notice that the voice was as beautiful as the face.

“Thank goodness! So am I. I half hoped you were, because of the wooden packing-cases outside your door. I know your name, by the way, because I saw it on those same packing-cases—mine's Claudia Maxwell.”

(Of course it would be Claudia, thought Hasil. How could that face belong to Ethel or Hilda or Amy?)

“I say, shall we go to cathedral together?” Miss Maxwell went on. “Or are you fixed up already?”

Hasil accepted gladly, and they were soon finding their way to Christchurch, reaching Tom Quad just as the bells were stopping. The sermon was addressed

definitely to the undergraduates of Oxford, as befitted the first Sunday in the first term of a new year, and Hasil realised, as she listened, that she was a member of a great and privileged community.

"Each one of you is an ambassador," said the musical voice from the pulpit, "who, sojourning a space in the courts of knowledge, shall presently journey abroad with precious despatches. Woe betide you if you think only of the fairness of the building, of the winding rivers which circle it, of the flower-painted meadows beyond, forgetting to garner up wisdom! What message will you bear to the waiting people when your time comes to pass out of the gates? You are citizens of no mean city, you dwellers in Oxford Colleges"—Hasil jumped—"and from you shall much be required."

They lingered behind when the congregation had filed out, wanting to learn something of the cathedral glories. Miss Maxwell knew what to look for, and together they enjoyed the passionate reds and blues of the window of St Frideswide in the Latin chapel, designed by Burne-Jones and executed by Morris, the shrine of St Frideswide itself, made beautiful with its loving carving of familiar leaves—maple, hawthorn, sycamore, crow-foot, ivy and bryony. But Hasil liked best the quaint old window depicting Jonah sitting under his gourd—in the foreground Jonah, behind him in primitive perspective, the walls and houses of Nineveh, with the sea crammed into a little corner low on the right-hand side, and above all, a big jolly-faced sun smiling broadly down.

Suddenly Hasil remembered Miss Maclean's intention of visiting her room, and they hurried back. On the

way she discovered to her joy that Miss Maxwell, too, was going in for the Literature Schools. She had taken one of her impulsive likings for this fellow-fresher and longed to have her for a friend. She would be the first friend of her own age she had ever known—how splendid it would be to find out if other girls felt as she did, to have someone in whom to confide innumerable nothings, someone to “do things with”! Claudia Maxwell, on her side, had admitted that she had liked the look of Hasil as far back as the station platform. Life was very full of promise for them both, and the flaming fire-fingers of Virginia creeper now showing so beautifully on the old grey walls of the colleges they passed might have served as fitting emblems of their youthful ardour and eagerness.

On the hall table were several little notes shaped like cocked hats and variously addressed; there was one for each of them.

“DEAR MISS LATHOM [Hasil read],—Miss Gray and I will be very pleased if you will come to tea with us in her room—No. 17—at four o’clock this afternoon. Yours sincerely,

“ B. RABAN.”

Claudia was similarly invited by Miss Gray to take tea with herself and Miss Raban, and Hasil chose to see good omen for their friendship in the fact that they were asked together.

“Will it be very awesome, do you suppose?” she said, as they walked upstairs.

“Bore some, more likely!” laughed Claudia, who was not yet overwhelmingly imbued with respect for the powers above her. They parted at the door of

Hasil's room. Horrors! Miss Maclean was there already, and not in the best of tempers.

"It is not usual for freshers to allow second-years to wait for them," she observed acidly.

"I'm most awfully sorry," said Hasil. "It was very good of you to bother to come."

The lady permitted herself to appear slightly mollified—still more so when Hasil produced a box of De Bry's chocolates, which had been Miss Royston's parting gift.

"You've got some jolly books," she condescended, glancing round the room. "Who's that man?"

"That's my father," said Hasil quietly, and for once Miss Maclean understood that no more was to be said.

"It's my washing-stand I hate so much," Hasil confessed presently. "Fancy having people come to see you, and being aware of your toothbrush and sponge all the time!"

"That's just what you aren't, silly! Haven't you ever heard of a screen? You buy one of those extremely useful articles at Barker's or Elliston & Cavell's (not Japanese, if you can help it, I beseech). After breakfast your bedroom becomes a study, and stays so till you go to bed. Look here, you'd better come and see my room, on the *acta, non verba* principle."

Her room, though a little overcrowded, was really charming. The walls were hung with good water-colours, which she proudly explained to be her sister's work. There were books, and photos, and a revolving bookcase, and flowers in tall pottery vases. A bright fire was burning in the grate, and two or three very capacious arm-chairs stood invitingly about—of bed and washing-stand there was no trace. She guessed at their

existence presently : the former transformed into a sofa, the latter behind a carved screen of some value.

"A bed by night, a Chesterfield by day," said Miss Maclean airily, and proceeded to explain that the miracle was wrought by placing a specially made bolster (known as a "sausage") along the length of the bed against the wall, with two smaller ones at the head and foot for arms, and covering the whole with bright-coloured cretonne or silk.

"Your scout will produce those sausages for you," she added; "you'll have to have a scout, you know—she's invaluable. You give her five shillings a term with occasional 'perks.' She washes up for you after your tea, coffee and cocoa parties, makes your fancy dresses, darns your stockings, and is always open to religious converse without any extra charge."

Further talk was cut short by the luncheon bell. The dining-hall was full of girls in what were more or less obviously Sunday clothes; the sea of faces made Hasil shy again, and she slipped into an empty seat beside Claudia Maxwell, thankful to have found a friend. A grave-faced senior at the head of the table asked them presently if they would go with her to the infirmary afterwards to sing hymns to the men in the accident ward. Panic instantly seized them both, but they saw nothing for it but to accept. It proved to be not at all terrible—the ubiquitous Miss Maclean presided at the piano, and chose the hymns, and the men seemed really to enjoy the singing. After a little talk with the more convalescent of the patients, they came away, and Claudia asked Hasil to come into her room for a chat before tea. Fortified by Miss Royston's chocolates, they sat on the floor in front of the fire, and talked, as

young things will, of books chiefly, with a little shy skirting round the subject of love and even of marriage. Each found the other's mind singularly sympathetic and complementary—Claudia's was the more balanced and philosophic, Hasil's the more alert and possibly more creative. They made a compact to read together every Sunday afternoon from three till four, and on the mat outside Miss Gray's room decided to become Claudia and Hasil to each other.

Inside, conversation seemed to be flagging. Two girls, who bore "Fresher" stamped all over them in capitals, sat awkwardly balancing tea-cups on their knees, while their hostesses plied them with bread and butter and cake. Now and then the conversation would hopefully flicker up at a new query from Miss Raban, only to be at once extinguished by a monosyllable from one of the freshers. Hasil and Claudia joined in the silence. At length Miss Gray, who had not yet spoken, fixed her mournful brown eyes on Hasil, and asked gloomily :

"Why did the kittiwake?"

"I beg your pardon?" said Hasil.

"I asked you," repeated Miss Gray, in a weary voice, "why the kittiwoke—I mean—why *did* the kittiwake?"

Claudia was apparently familiar with this species of query, but Hasil had never encountered it, and could only blush and say she did not know.

"To fetch the cat a piller—caterpillar—cat a pillow, see?" Miss Gray replied, roused to something like cheerfulness by her unwonted success. "You're the first person I've met this term who hadn't heard it in the Vac. Don't you think it's awfully good?"

Hasil, carefully avoiding Claudia's eye, said that she

did, and then there was a long silence, broken at last by the striking of five o'clock from some bell near by. One of the freshers thereupon rose, and after carefully depositing her crumbs in the fireplace, held out a tentative hand, and quickly withdrew it upon seeing it was evidently not expected of her. Balancing herself on one foot at the door, she stammered, "G-good-bye—so good of you to ask me," and incontinently fled.

After as short an interval as decency would allow, Hasil, Claudia and the other fresher departed together, not shutting the door in time to prevent hearing a fervent "Thank heaven, *that's* over!" from the weary hostesses.

Hasil spent the next hour or so writing home, and if you had peeped into those college rooms just then you would have found most of their inmates so engaged. (Therefore mothers flatter themselves that they get a weekly chronicle of the Oxford doings of son or daughter; but how much of the experience that really matters can be put down on paper, even if the spirit were willing?)

Hasil had just finished her letter to Aunt Selina when there was a knock at her door.

"Come in," she said nervously.

There appeared a girl who, at first sight, seemed every whit as nervous as Hasil herself. She came and stood in front of the fire, twisting and untwisting ungainly hands, and every now and then pushing back wisps of hair that kept falling into her spectacled eyes. By no means a prepossessing person as she stood there, flushing a difficult red, and Hasil wondered why on earth she had come if the visit cost her so much. At last she spoke :

"My name is Stoney, Miss Lathom," she said abruptly. "I am secretary of the C.U., and I came to ask you if you would become a—a member."

"I don't know what the C.U. is," said Hasil. What organisation could possibly have selected Miss Stoney as secretary?

"Oh!" Miss Stoney's voice had a sound of pain in it. "It is the Christian Union, and during the week there are D.P.M.'s and B.C.'s for those who care to come."

"And they are——?" suggested Hasil, feeling like Alice in Wonderland.

"Daily Prayer Meetings and Bible Circles, of course," explained Miss Stoney, still in the same tone of pained wonder. "The object of the C.U. is to unite together those students in college who acknowledge Christ as their Master, and to try to draw in Those Who Are Still Outside. There is a meeting in the Drawing School to-night, immediately after prayers—will you come?"

"I don't think I'd better, Miss Stoney," said Hasil, in some confusion. "You see, I don't know anything about it, and I'm not quite sure what I think about things, and altogether I—I think I'd better stay away."

Miss Stoney's eyes gleamed with all the joy of the ardent proselytiser who sees a chance of plucking a possible brand from the burning.

"How can you know anything about it till you've been to a meeting?" she replied severely, her nervousness forgotten. "If you come, you can decide later on whose side you'll be during your college years—God's or the devil's. The Drawing School at 8.45 to-night." She was gone, leaving Hasil to realise that she was booked for that meeting, and to reflect rather bitterly

on the unfair advantage possessed by seniors over freshers.

On Sunday evenings the meal of "Odds and Ends" took the place of dinner. Its name explains it—it began with salmon and salad and turkey and chicken and ham and tongue—it was accompanied by tea and coffee, and it ended with cake and jam. The atmosphere was more social than on weekdays, and there was the pleasing consciousness of a long evening to follow, talking, writing or reading. Prayers came when the meal was finished, in the little chapel in the grounds, consisting of the ordinary service of evening prayer, omitting one lesson. Then when it was over, the college broke as one voice into a hymn that had grown somehow to be regarded as the college song. It was only the "freshers" who did not know the words and, recognising the melody, were fumbling with the leaves of their hymn-books; the dons on the right and the third and fourth years on the left in the front pews could be trusted not to falter.

"For all the Saints who from their labours rest. . . ."

It was always sung at the beginning of a new college year, and the unspoken thought in everybody's mind was for those who had gone out into the world. Out from the place that had seemed to some of them for three years the dearest home they had ever known, to sow on an often barren and thankless soil the seed they took with them of noble thinking, of that Truth which indeed makes men free. Without the slightest thought of irreverence, this hymn, in default of a song of their own, was sacred to each one of them as embodying prayers for those gone forth equipped, and prayers for

themselves, who stayed behind, not yet ready. So it was that with the fourth verse, the harmony of voices, all sweet with the virginal note of inexperience, rose high in a surge of feeling, as the twofold significance came home to them :

“ O blest communion ! fellowship Divine !
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine,
(Cr.) Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.
ALLELUIA ! ! ”

Hasil, with her instant responsiveness to calls upon the emotional side of her nature, felt a lump rising in her throat, and angrily forced back the hot tears that stung her eyes. Fool that she was ! What on earth was there to cry about, because a handful of girls joined in singing a hymn she had known since her childish days ? With the thought came the remembrance of how the same tears blinded her as she sat beside her father in his “ tum-tum ” on a glorious November morning in Calcutta, and watched the troops on the Maidan filing past. She sniffed again the freshness in the breeze after those dreary months of rain ; she experienced the same exultation of spirit that had made her long to stand up in the trap and lash the pony to a gallop. Now as then there was the same half-unconscious thanksgiving that she was alive and could feel so keenly. She flung back her head and sang the last verse out of the fulness of her heart, the pupils of her beautiful eyes large and black with the intensity of her feeling.

(ff.) “ From earth’s wide bounds, from ocean’s farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
ALLELUIA ! ! ”

One had the right to sing as one of this community; she was enrolled for ever in the army of women who "did things," whose values were not false, whose aim was single. How splendid it was—how splendid!

But this exaltation gave place to depression when college dispersed. "I feel so awful," she said to Claudia, as they walked through the garden together—and went on to describe the unwelcome advent of Miss Stoney.

"I wouldn't let that worry me," said Claudia. "I had a tract sent me once by a despairing maiden aunt because I smoked occasionally—'Ripe for Hell.' I think I'll cut the title off and nail it under the name-plate on my door. 'Claudia Maxwell, Ripe for Hell,' ought to frighten them off."

"It's all very well for you," sighed poor Hasil. "You haven't been caught."

"No; and when I am, I sha'n't give in without a struggle, I promise you! Come into my room afterwards and tell me all about it. I've got a tin of short-bread and some cocoa; I don't know how to make cocoa, and it would be rather a good time to try."

There seemed to be a prevailing embarrassment in the Drawing School. Nobody ever drew there—it was just a bleak room which owed its name to a collection of plaster casts and some prints of a heterogeneous nature—lions and dogs and stags and Roman excavations.

Some thirty girls were gathered there, and among these some were obviously to the manner born and bred up in evangelical ways, others as obviously were there to do violence to their feelings, being newly persuaded that one should suffer to that extent for one's

belief. The president, a little bright-eyed person, with a trick of putting her head on one side like a robin, and known as "Robin" throughout college, evidently belonged to the former class, and opened the meeting without a trace of nervousness in fluent prayer.

"O God [she prayed], help us to do great work for Thee this term. There are many new ones in our midst, and some of them perhaps have never felt the need of Thee, and others have felt the need, but do not know how to satisfy it. Help us so to order our lives, at our lectures, in our games, and at all times that the world may know we are true soldiers of the Cross, pledged to follow our Lord Jesus Christ to the end, whatever that end may be. Give us tact in dealing with souls for Thee, and take from us the spirit of hyper-criticism, which tempts us to fancy ourselves better than others. Bless our friendships, and sanctify them to Thy use. Bless our work for our tutors, and purge us of petty ambition and a mere desire for place. Walk with us all the term, dear Lord—so shall our feet not stumble. And this we beg for Thy Son's sake. AMEN."

The meeting rose from its knees amid mumbled Amens, and then the president called upon Miss Stoney to speak. Miss Stoney was in real anguish—she stood before them plucking at the large flat velvet buttons on her skirt, with beads of perspiration standing on her white face. Hasil suffered out of sympathy almost as much as she did, and thought of the early Christian martyrs. After all, they had only been tortured in their bodies, but here, she felt instinctively, was a human soul

upon the rack. Miss Stoney was speaking—but Hasil could only just catch the words :

“ I have been asked to say what the C.U. has done for me,” she began. “ As a child I never heard the name of God except in blasphemy. My parents were not good. My mother ”—her voice hesitated and dropped, but she clenched her hands and went on—“ my mother drank. . . . My father was awfully clever, but he was an utter sceptic, and I knew Voltaire at an age when other children are reading Grimm and Hans Andersen. I came up here scoffing at all things, like my father. . . . But then he died, and I felt alone in the world—my mother had left us before. . . . One night Robin—Miss Lethbridge—came into my room. I didn’t know her, and I told her I was too busy to talk, I had an essay to finish. She said she wanted to stay, and I got angry and asked her what right she had to come into my room uninvited—and she said—she said God had authorised her. She told me about the C.U., and I was surprised a person reading for Greats could believe such complete rot ! I said Christianity was a religion for mechanics and artisans, not for the thinking intellectual section of society. . . . She said—oh, I can’t tell you all she said, but she asked me if I’d be willing to argue it out with her on Sundays, after ‘ Odds and Ends.’ I agreed—and—and little by little I began to see something in it. She argued very well, but she herself was her strongest argument—she *lived* her religion somehow. . . . It took her over a year, but she won in the end. . . . I find it awfully difficult to talk to you about it like this, but it has made all the difference in my life to belong to a thing like the C.U., and I hope that those of you who have just come up

will give it a trial. It doesn't come easily to me to speak of what I feel—but at least I can tell you that I came to scoff, but remained to pray.”

There was silence when she had finished. Nobody liked to look at Miss Stoney, nobody cared to meet anybody else's eye; one sought refuge on the toes of one's shoes, or straight over the many heads on to the wall beyond. Hasil's face was pale, and her heart was beating furiously. This was the real thing with a vengeance—quite a different Christianity from Aunt Selina's or Mr Royston's—a militant Christianity this, with blood and sweat upon its brow. It was fine—whatever remained to be said of its tenets and practices, it was fine. The incident had appealed to her dramatic instinct; she was fired, as a soldier is fired with the pomp and circumstance of war in his first campaign.

Ensnconced in Claudia's not too reliable wicker arm-chair (it had a way of swooning heavily on its right side, depositing its unwarned occupant on the floor), the glow departed somewhat and she felt glad she had refused to sign the little form of membership.

“Rank indecency, my dear,” was Claudia's summing up “I would rather have paraded before them *à la* Lady Godiva! Some things are too sacred to talk about—suppose you were deeply in love with a man and he with you, would you think it necessary for the sake of love and other people to go about with a board back and front, advertising it like a sandwichman? So here—I am of the humble opinion that to live your life of love would be the best thanksgiving to God, and the best way of telling other people to go and do likewise. No; I consider there are just a few things I am privi-

leged to keep to myself, or share only with my dearest friends, and my religion is one of them."

She nibbled daintily at her shortbread as she spoke, and churned the fearsome decoction they had made in a saucepan over the fire. Hasil, looking at the heroic moulding of her features, realised that for whatever reason her new friend might choose to hold aloof from the C.U., cowardice would have no part in it.

Was Claudia right, or Miss Stoney? She spent some time wondering after she was in bed, while the girl overhead poked her fire with noisy diligence. Then sleep came, and lasted till a factory hooter roused her at six with a terrific start to the facing of her first day of work.

CHAPTER IX

HER time at Oxford always seemed to Hasil very like an Oriental carpet—glowing with every imaginable colour and yet wrought, as far as the eye could see, on no particular pattern. The life took hold of her from the very first and claimed her utmost. She was fascinated with the fulness of it and, like a child at a party, she could not decide upon any one of the attractions for fear of losing a better, and so chose them all.

To begin with, she became an ardent Liberal member of the St Frideswide Parliament. The Conservative party happened to be in power then, and she sat far into the night devising attacks upon the Government as to their negligence in not building necessary railways in unheard-of corners of the world, and in most other things, for that matter, with which it was their business to deal!

She was an interesting speaker, colouring all she said with the force of her feeling, and her love of words for their own sake. Her actual grip of politics was slight, but her enthusiasm was aroused directly the question under discussion took on human aspect, just as in the old days of her arithmetic lessons.

She joined the boat club and suffered agonies under the caustic comments of the president, a hatred of having to confess failure being all that saved her from the first time on the river being her last. She joined the hockey club, too, having even less idea of the game

than of sculling. The captain in her time was a Miss Oliver, who had the knack of saying the most terrible things in a drawling, purring monotone. As Hasil stood miserably on the field at her first practice, endeavouring with all her might to hit the ball, but seldom succeeding, Miss Oliver mildly observed: "Don't trouble to bring a hockey-stick next time, Miss Lathom; I fancy an umbrella will serve your purpose just as well." Hasil felt slightly cheered when she heard Claudia asked, a few minutes later, if she had thought it was a croquet practice. Fortunately for her, English doggedness tempered Eastern hatred of ridicule, so she stuck to both hockey and sculling, and ultimately attained a certain level of ability. In one thing alone she excelled. In order to join the boat club at all, the rule at St Frideswide's wisely laid down that you must be able to swim not less than fifty feet. Hasil had had no opportunity of learning before she came up, and learnt now in the Merton baths. It came to her very soon, and remained an abiding joy. She and Claudia, in bathing dresses, used to take out the St Frideswide's canoe *You and I* before breakfast in the June term, and try punting her with a long pole each. The inevitable upset was merely an excuse for a glorious time in the clear, cool Cherwell, with the sun shining on the meadows and, if they were lucky, on a kingfisher's back, as he skimmed and wheeled above the reedy shallows. Sometimes, if they had no lectures and an easy day, they would steer the canoe into a little back-water above Marston Ferry—hardly visible unless you knew where to look—and breakfasted on eggs, bread and butter and tea, as if it were nectar and ambrosia, and they young gods. Afterwards, perhaps, a long

morning in God's out-of-doors, reading, reading, reading—the silence broken sometimes by fascinating discussions arising from their work, the exact significance of the clown in Shakespeare, for instance, or the relation of comedy to tragedy, and whether a person or a situation were inherently tragic or comic, or only from the onlooker's point of view. Then followed an argument as to what you meant by tragedy, and Claudia, who had a classical father, quoted Sophocles, and Hasil quoted Chaucer, and they both got so excited that the little *You and I* was in imminent peril of shipwreck, till they were interrupted by a dripping undergraduate whom Fate had unkindly deposited in the river from his punt, through too great a devotion to his pole, and who now begged them of their charity to ferry him to the other side—which they did, marvelling greatly that man should be reputed woman's lord.

Their first "May morning" was a thing to be remembered. It fell on a Sunday, and they rose in the grey light and hurried with a company of others to Magdalen, to hear the choirboys sing from the top of the old tower. Then, burdened only with a string bag containing sandwiches and an orange apiece, they set out Shotover way, neither knowing nor caring where their steps led them, giving themselves up to the beauty of the day, and the gladness that was in them. Spring poured her treasures into their laps. First it was a wood so carpeted with primroses that, step you never so carefully, you might not avoid them—next, a little brook, where of course they waded. Then a plantation of hyacinths, the property of some dog-in-the-manger person, who apparently did not come himself to gather them and strove to prevent others doing so by a for-

bidding-looking notice about trespassers and the rigour of the law. Claudia said she was a Utopian, and in Utopia all things were common, and Hasil decided that they could neither of them read English, though they could speak it a little. Then, with easy consciences, they scrambled through the barbed wire, and plundered to their hearts' content, revenging the torn skirts by sticks laid crosswise near the spot, which Claudia said was the gipsy symbol that they would come again one day in greater numbers to burn and slay.

They reached St Frideswide's in time for tea, and afterwards set about arranging their sheaves of hyacinths, and the next entry in Hasil's diary after 14th October stood under 1st May: "I think this has been the happiest day I can remember."

And then the wonderful evenings on the river—evenings when they guided the old *Cantupset* out of the bend where the St Frideswide boathouse lay, and lazily floated upstream, sometimes punting, but more often paddling. Have you ever noticed that every part of the day on the river has its own particularly appropriate craft? You are lacking in the true river spirit if you choose anything but a canoe before ten o'clock of a morning on the Cher—you may do your utmost with "inrig" and "outrigger" between ten and five; but after that, if you are really a Cher-lover, you will know that nothing but a punt will do. For in nothing but a punt can you wander blissfully in that borderland between sleep and waking, when in compensation for the growing loss of the ego sense, the beauty in everything around you is intensified almost past your bearing. . . . And presently a little mist creeps up over the fields, shrouding tree and hedge, like a careful

housemaid wrapping the silver in its baize bags for the night. The yellow irises at the water's edge nod dreamily—the bats are flying so low that at times their shrill voices seem at your very ear, and you remember that you have heard they like to tangle themselves in curly hair—the moon shines down a trifle coldly. A boat laden with various male representatives of England's future greatness drifts by, and with it a refrain from the latest musical comedy—North Oxford passes you hurrying homewards, and you hear scraps of conversation.

“ Well, Flora dear, what would *you* wear? ”

“ I should wear my green voile,” comes the answer firmly; “ we ought to make a stand against this fashion of high necks at evening parties, *pour encourager les autres!* ”

These were the fragments Hasil and Claudia overheard one evening. Hasil listened eagerly for low-chanted poetry: “ The Scholar Gypsy,” for instance, or “ The Ode to a Grecian Urn,” but even their most promising boatload—three spectacled undergraduates with notebooks and unwieldy tomes—were only discussing the best place in the Haymarket for pipes. But it was all very wonderful and very beautiful all the same—it seemed to Hasil that in hours like these she could almost feel her soul growing.

Then for a time she was an enthusiastic member of the Archæological Society, and wandered round Oxford, tracking the spirit of the past. She found it in the quaint old church of St Peter's-in-the-East, from whose crypt, it is said, Fair Rosamund stole through a secret passage up into the chancel and met her royal lover at his prayers; she found it in the ruins of Godstow

Abbey, which whisper of that same beautiful lady's untimely end—in the glorious old gardens of New, William of Wykeham's College, whose trees hide the bastions of the mediæval city walls—at Carfax—where was it not, indeed?

Gradually she came to know and distinguish the colleges (by no means such a paltry achievement as it sounds), then to associate with each its wealth of romantic legend, and quite as romantic history, till all Oxford spoke to her, and she felt herself a part, infinitesimal and ineffectual, but still a part, of that great Spirit which is Oxford.

Whether it was evensong at Christchurch, when the notes of the treble solo in the anthem sounded among the aisles and pillars as exquisitely pure and detached as a bird song, and it seemed as if even the figures sleeping in their carven shrines must awake to listen—or Addison's Walk in winter, with every branch a galaxy of jewels, and the grass beside the path a magic gossamer—or the quaint old figures in Magdalen cloisters—or Christchurch kitchens, where thirty chickens were roasting at once, and the cook presented you with meringues—she was it, and it was she.

She was glad to spend herself to the utmost. Oxford could not claim more than she was most eager to give. She must have traded on her strength at this time, but she was so absolutely happy that it did not seem to matter.

Her friendship with Claudia grew rapidly, and she lavished upon it all the romance and passion of her nature. She did not know it, but Claudia stood to her at present in the place of the Man of her earlier prayers. Here was a delightful companion, ever sympathetic,

whether for piping or for lamenting—giving quite as gladly as she took, and always revealing something new and strange. As yet, the physical need in Hasil slept. West had laid a restraining hand on East, and she was as innocent and unknowing as any other girl brought up in similar surroundings. She knew physiological facts as far as books could tell her them, but she had known them since she was ten. In relation to herself, they had no meaning. She understood them mentally, not physically, and Miss Fairbank, the literature tutor in residence at St Frideswide's, realised this at once. For some students, considerably older than Hasil, she was in the habit of deleting certain passages in Elizabethan plays with an expurgatorial "Omit this scene," or "You need not read the next two pages," but she never suggested this course of action for Hasil, and as Hasil remarked to Claudia: "If she had, I should have been constrained to tell her at the next coaching that I naturally read those first."

It took her some time to get her work under proper control. Finding herself for the first time in her life under no restraint as to when or for how long she worked, provided she came to the weekly coachings armed with an essay, it seemed natural on some days to spend long hours in the fields or on the river, atoning for it on others by rising early and retiring late. And at Castle Holme, except for her own books, there had been a very meagre library—shelves of Miss Braddon and Marie Corelli, neat editions of people like Mrs Hemans, and some books on birds, and the rearing of flowers. Looking back, she remembered only two purple patches—Dickens, complete in a fascinating edition, very long and thin and green, and an old

volume of "Percy's Reliques" in battered leather covers, with its leaves musty and mildewed. Here at St Frideswide's were books on every hand and on every conceivable subject, and she frequently spent long days deep in books that were not likely to matter very much as far as Schools were concerned. William James' "Varieties of Religious Experience" was one of these, and she added it to that dreadful night in the West Library, as data to be considered at some future time to help her to deduce a satisfactory conclusion.

Hard thinking certainly made her mental powers more acute and trained her logical faculty, but it took her longer to get her own work in hand. She was too ready to reject what she did not easily assimilate, possibly because in those parts of the work which she loved, sympathetic insight brought understanding with very little conscious effort. Thus at first the philological part of the work bored her, and she "scamped" it, not realising the beauty of the study of language for its own sake. The defect in her early education served her badly here, for her imagination and poetic feeling would have made her translations of the grand old epic of Beowulf interesting, if they had not been so full of grammatical faults.

"You may possibly be some sort of a minor poet one day, Miss Lathom," said her tutor, "but I think you will never be a scholar." Luckily for her, however, her tutor for this subject regarded philology as the one interest in life that made it worth living, and Hasil, at first merely sympathetic, as she always was to enthusiasm of any kind, was at last surprised to find herself with a real grip of the detested thing—the dry bones had come to life.

"I am an Elizabethan at heart, you know," she said one day to another of her tutors, when he had criticised her essay as appreciative and alive, but too excessive, and lacking in philosophic balance.

"So was Shakespeare," he rejoined drily. "You only mean you sympathise with the faults of the first Elizabethans. But theirs were the defects of their qualities—their glowing sense of life and of new worlds at their very gates, and their wonderful gift of expressing that sense. That was when the morning stars sang together, but as you are a product of this effete twentieth century, and can't hope for their early vigour, you may as well cease imitating their early blemishes."

It was primarily this same tutor, Mr Mildmay, who stung her into disciplining her reading and thinking. He had given her one day an essay on "Tendencies of Elizabethan Literature." She devoted so much time to the dramatists that she had none left for the prose, and was obliged to content herself with a desultory reading of Sidney's "Arcadia," which she set down as artificial and frigid. He said nothing until she had finished reading her essay to him, and then said:

"When I asked you for this essay, I meant what I said—I didn't want very ordinary appreciations of obviously beautiful passages from the dramatists. You set down the prose as artificial and frigid: kindly go home and come again when you have read Hakluyt's 'Voyages.' Raleigh's 'History of the World.' and Nash's 'Unfortunate Traveller.' Your essay reminds me of Swinburne writing in delirium tremens."

Hasil, reading with burning cheeks that night passages such as: "O eloquent, just and mightie death," Hakluyt's description of "The manners, usages and

ceremonies of the Russes," and most of all, perhaps, the ingenuous diary of Jack Wilton, that thirsty page of Henry VIII.'s camp at Tournay, wondered why anyone as hopelessly shallow as herself should ever have meditated a course of literature at Oxford.

Her sensitiveness made her suffer more keenly than she need have done from reproofs like these, but their effect was nothing but salutary, for she acknowledged them as just. Besides, Mr Mildmay had a way of simply saying nothing when he regarded students as beyond all hope, so Hasil hugged her thorns as proof of an interest not yet dead.

She was brought into contact with the finest minds in England. She heard the then Professor of Poetry deliver wonderful lectures on Shakespeare's plays in a still, small voice, so obviously free from any striving after effect that it seemed as if he really did not know the golden value of what he was saying. She heard the Professor of Greek read his verse-translations of the "Troades" in the dimly lighted hall of Balliol, the music of it bearing her straight back to Troy, all the ages swept away. She was invited to breakfast with the master of Balliol, and heard him talk of his great predecessor, and handle great themes as easily as Samson slew the Philistines. She and Claudia went to hear Yeats plead his courageous scheme of a drama for the Ireland he loved—all those who thought they had penetrated a little nearer to the heart of beauty than other men came sooner or later to Oxford for sympathy and encouragement.

Hasil lived in a dream-world of colour and joy, happy in the knowledge that, however thirstily she might drink of the fountain, it could never run dry. She was

strung up to the highest pitch of her being, sensitised to every impression, hungry for every emotion, stretching out feelers for experience, as it were, in every direction.

So the gods, looking casually down one day from the blue heights of Olympus, decided that she was ready for them at last.

CHAPTER X

It was drawing to the close of the Hilary term of Hasil's first year, and she and Claudia were walking down the High Street on a Sunday afternoon. Claudia's father had been a brilliant classic and a fellow of Balliol, and for his sake she had many friends in Oxford; and this Sunday she had insisted on Hasil's accompanying her to call on some "specially nice" people in Peter's Lane. Hasil, who hated Sunday clothes, had only been bribed by Claudia's declaring that the Granvilles often had music, and that altogether it was very friendly and not in the least terrifying.

"A man will be introduced to me," prophesied Hasil, "whose one interest in the world is the blank in Egyptian history between the So-and-So and the Thingumibob Dynasties, and I shall look as depressed and vacuous as I feel, and be voted a social failure."

"The people at the Granvilles are always interesting," Claudia answered. "Just be yourself; but you will be, once you're there—you can't be anything else with Mrs Granville. She's Irish and talkative, and loves to have lots of people round her, and get them to know each other."

"I have an inward sinking which isn't hunger, all the same, and I wish I were at home in bed."

Claudia knew Hasil was really over-shy and self-conscious, except where she was sure of being perfectly understood, so she only laughed, and then began

a discussion of the details of a reading-party in Devonshire they had been asked to join for the vacation—which lasted till the Granvilles' house was reached.

There seemed to be several people in the drawing-room, and nobody appeared at all shy or ill at ease. Claudia at once noticed the long, ungainly Scotch Professor of Ancient History, whose classical reputation was as famous as his extraordinary taste in dress. To-day he wore a pepper-and-salt suit of an alarmingly large check pattern, with trousers all too briefly turned up to display socks of a magenta never seen on sea or land. His hair stood up all over his head, Struwelpeter fashion, and he reminded Hasil at once and for ever of the Mad Hatter. His little wife, red-cheeked, shiny, and tightly buttoned in brown, seemed utterly bourgeoisie and unintellectual, yet Hasil discovered afterwards that she was an unusually clever Girton graduate, nearly as fine a classic as her husband, and far more capable. Mr Mildmay, looking more animated than she had ever seen him, was playing cat's cradle with the youngest Granville boy—Fräulein Hagemann, the somewhat grim German tutor at St Frideswide's, was laughing over the Bad Child's Book of Beasts with a very young and fair-haired undergraduate who did not seem at all awe-inspired.

So much, then, for "the aristocracy of passionate souls," and the diviner ether wherein Hasil had always believed such mighty intelligences wont to dwell, even on Sundays!

She had time to notice these one or two she knew among the guests, as they stood for a moment unperceived in the noise of talk and laughter. Then Mrs Robertson gently attracted Mrs Granville's attention to

them, and that lady at once left the group standing near the fire and came towards them.

"So you have brought Miss Lathom, Claudia?" she said. "I am so glad. Come and sit by the fire, Miss Lathom—it is still cold, isn't it, although we're so near the end of term. Tea will be in directly, and my babies will be back from their walk. Do you know Mr Harding? Mr Harding—Miss Lathom. But I sha'n't leave you very long to talk, because Mr Harding has promised to sing."

At that moment Mrs Granville caught sight of her twins from the window—little girls in scarlet coats and caps, who were faithful miniatures of their mother—and fled to meet them. Hasil turned, to find Mr Harding regarding her critically, and annoyed to find herself blushing, she plunged into conversation.

"Mrs Granville says you are going to sing. I do envy people who can express themselves in any way at all—especially, perhaps, in music."

"Are you so fond of music, then?"

"Yes; it means a great deal to me, but I'm no good at it, and at St Frideswide's there is a total dearth of it. I'd much rather there were no table-napkins or chairs or things like that."

He seemed interested to hear she was at St Frideswide's, and drew her on to tell him of her impressions, till tea came in, with Doreen and Sheila on its heels, clamouring for sweeties. After Sheila was discovered surreptitiously draining the empty cups for the sake of possible sugar at the bottom, the twins were despatched nurserywards, and presently Mrs Granville came up to them and bore Mr Harding off to the piano, totally disregarding his plaintive query as to how one could

sing after a plethora of buttered buns and tea-cakes.

As he sat there, striking idle chords and evidently trying to make up his mind as to which song he should sing, Hasil had an opportunity of seeing him at her leisure. He was slightly above the average height, with dark virile hair, grey-green eyes, and strongly marked features. Against the pale colouring of the wall on his left, his profile stood out sharply, and she saw how powerful was the line from ear to chin, and how confident the poise of his head. His mouth was firm set, but very sweet in expression when he smiled, and that and his eyes seemed to redeem his rather lowering face from a something that she had at first put down as insolent. He had the brow of an artist, and long, strong hands. So much she noted when he began to sing :

“ A little breeze blew over the sea,
And it came from far away,
Across the fields of millet and rice,
All warm with sunshine and sweet with spice,
It lifted his curls and kissed him thrice,
As upon the deck he lay.

It said : ‘ O idle upon the sea,
Awake and with sleep have done,
Haul up the widest sail of the prow,
And come with me to the rice-fields now,
She longs—O how can I tell you how?—
To show you your firstborn son.’ ”

His voice was baritone in quality, and very flexible. He seemed to modulate it as he pleased and to give the little song all the tenderness and grace it demanded. Amid a chorus of thanks he found his way to the empty chair he had left.

"That was Laurence Hope's," said Hasil, her eyes bright. "I didn't know it had been set to music."

"It hasn't in anything but manuscript, as far as I'm aware, Miss Lathom. Do you approve of it, such as it is?"

"I think it's just right," she answered. "You feel the breeze blowing softly all through the accompaniment, fragrant as only Indian breezes can be."

He turned to her, as if he were more interested than he had expected to be.

"Do you know for yourself they are fragrant?"

"I was born in India," she said, "and spent the first fifteen years of my life there. It still seems more real to me in some ways than anything that's happened since. There's so much more colour, isn't there? And one doesn't forget colour."

"No—and I can quite understand how grey England must have seemed at first. But she is full of a less insistent colour, too, only you don't discover her secret just at first—that the grey is quite the best background she could have chosen for her other colouring. You begin to guess that in Oxford, I think; if you don't believe me, walk along the upper river on the first grey day and see!"

"But it is a faint-hearted scheme of colour when you think of India," objected Hasil.

"Can you remember any colour impression in particular? I'm awfully interested in India—her people seem to me the most wonderful in the world, and I hope to go there some day."

"Well, I remember a native woman in a bright blue saree, standing in the dusty road balancing a big copper vessel on her head—paddyfields against the blue sky—

native troops on the Maidan—it's so satisfying somehow."

"In defence of Alma Mater, Miss Lathom, I should like you to notice some day the Radcliffe against a June sky—it's Italy if it isn't India. Still, I could wish at times that it had pleased heaven to make me a pure-bred Rajah, with the blood of centuries of kings in my veins. Only I wonder if this barbaric colour-love in you and me isn't a relic of our savage state, which will become less and less in our successive and more highly civilised lives."

"How much of all that do you mean?" she asked him, her shyness forgotten. "Colour is a splendid thing and you can't have too much of it—the greenery-yallery point of view isn't civilisation, it's decadence."

"I am to be taken *au pied de la lettre*. May I ask you in return what you consider the most beautiful thing in the world?"

She thought he wanted to change the subject, and answered, rather piqued: "The Venus of Milo."

"And what particular colour-scheme attracts you in her?" he returned mockingly.

She could not help laughing, but answered defiantly: "There is colour in it, all the same, just as there is in Beethoven and Grieg. Do you know what I mean when I say that the sound of a violin is mauve?"

"You are talking nonsense," he said gravely, but as she looked up at him angrily, she saw that his eyes were smiling and that he understood.

Someone else was just going to play, and as she caught sight at that moment of Claudia frantically signalling, she got up to go.

"Good-bye," he said, shaking hands; "you won't

forget the upper river and the Radcliffe, will you? ”

“ Well,” said Claudia, when they were outside, “ for one for whom the blank in Egyptian history is a comparatively new interest, you didn’t do badly ! ”

“ Don’t be an ass, Claudia ! ”

“ Well, what were you talking about, I should like to know? ”

“ About colour.”

“ I don’t see how you can talk about colour for a solid hour.”

“ I’m sorry, but your perception is at fault, not me. We were discussing colour in India as opposed to England, and whether violin sounds are mauve.”

“ Whether pigs have wings, don’t you mean? ”

“ Claudia ! You’re absolutely excelling yourself this afternoon ! ” said Hasil, a trifle irritably. “ Who did *you* talk to? It doesn’t seem to have agreed with you, whoever it was ! ”

Claudia stared. It was so rarely that Hasil was irritable.

“ Oh ! I was talking to Mr Granville most of the time,” she said. “ Did you notice him? He is much quieter than she is, but awfully nice when you get to know him. He and father were college friends, and he was telling me about him, and how excited they both were when father got the Newdigate for his poem on Coriolanus—I hope he’s coming up to Oxford soon, Hasil, I would love you to know him. Then Mr Robertson joined in and there was a fearsome mention of ‘ Aorists,’ so I sought refuge with Doreen and Sheila, and taught them how to whistle through their teeth. Mrs Roberston was talking away nineteen to the dozen

to Mrs Granville about what to do when babies swallow buttons—another instance of the hand that could have ruled the world rocking the cradle.”

“Your lust for smart sayings, Claudia, will bring you to an untimely end. Would you mind collecting your thoughts so far as to tell me your views as to where Mallacombe is, how to get to it, and what work we shall do when we get there?”

It was not until after prayers that evening that Claudia, laying down “Marius the Epicurean,” deemed it safe to inquire from the snug depths of her untrustworthy arm-chair:

“What *did* you think of Mr Harding, as a matter of fact?”

“Oh, I don’t know, Claudia. We got on all right. Did you know he put that song to music himself? Who is he, by the way?”

“He’s a sort of relation of the Granvilles, and awfully clever, I believe—lectures for Professor Robertson sometimes, and coaches a few of his pupils. He’s thirty-three or thereabouts, and quite well off; he’s always talking of going to Greece excavating or something, but it hasn’t come off yet. He seems to be good at most things—interesting person, don’t you think?”

“Interesting, but irritating too. He’s one of those people who want to find out all about you and don’t mean to give you anything in exchange. They make me feel more inclined than anything I know to tell lies about myself.”

“And did you?”

“No; as a matter of fact, I didn’t—because it’s so very awkward to keep on living up to them if you happen to meet the person afterwards, but he made

me almost angry once or twice. You feel he's just recording his impressions most of the time somehow."

"Do you like his face?"

"I do, and I don't, Claudia. Till he smiled I thought him heavy and rather insolent-looking, but his smile changes him and he's got really nice eyes—they remind me of the sea in October; one of those days when there's a light on it, though the land is dark."

"What though your speech
Not liketh me?
Your eyes are like
October sea,"

chanted Claudia, but it struck Hasil at the time that somehow her jesting did not ring true. She was dimly thinking that perhaps Claudia was tired, and rather than own to it, was simulating an interest she did not feel, when the cocoa boiled over. By the time the matter was righted, she had forgotten the momentary impression.

On the following Tuesday, Hasil found a letter on the hall table addressed to her, and bearing in the corner the neat initials A.H., in accordance with Oxford traditions. It was an invitation to the Union to hear a debate on the motion "That this House considers that the standards of Political Morality need not be identical with those of individual conduct."

Claudia shrugged her shoulders when she heard, and looked provoking, but Hasil, who had never been, set off on Thursday evening in quite a state of excitement, with five other students, and the long-suffering don whose lot it was to chaperon the whole party.

She was much amused by the printed warning to the

effect that the gallery did not form part of the House, and by the preliminary byplay of "business" before the debate opened. The case for the motion was very well put, and it seemed to Hasil that it was just as ably opposed. But the speakers who followed were wordy and rather crude, and the discussion deteriorated into the "It all depends what you mean" species. The place was hot, and she was beginning to feel sleepy, when Harding came into the gallery and tiptoed across to her.

"What do you say on this motion, Miss Lathom?" he asked softly, as he sat down beside her.

"I'm in the pitiable condition of being able to see both sides equally clearly," Hasil said. "The opener and opposer were both so good."

"Dear me, what a dreadful state of things! So your convictions depend on the eloquence of other people?"

"Most convictions do, I think," answered Hasil, flushing hotly at the provoking lightness of his tone. "Wasn't that rather the point of people like Savonarola and Luther, and reformers in general? What is *your* opinion, by the way?"

"Oh, it's too complicated to go into now," he replied. "Besides, we really mustn't talk so much. I'm sure that lady over there is chaperoning you, and has just determined never to do so again."

Hasil was too angry to say anything, and they sat in silence till the debate was concluded, and the motion lost by a few votes. They shook hands at the bottom of the stairs, and she thanked him for the invitation, but she was not effusive, and hoped he saw she thoroughly resented their conversation. He did not

seem to take her seriously at all, and he had no right to ask her point of view if he had no intention of stating his. She was nearly sure that she disliked him.

On reaching St Frideswide's, she went straight to Claudia's room to unburden her annoyance, but was confronted by a card fastened to the name-label on her door, bearing the words "Gone to sleep." She listened for a moment, hoping Claudia would hear her, and call out to her to come in, but there was no sound, and it seemed quite dark inside. Curiously enough, she had thought she saw from the garden the light still burning in Claudia's room—she must have been mistaken.

She forgot all about Adrian Harding in the rush of the few days that were all that was left of term. She was satisfied, on the whole, with her position in College; she was beginning to feel her feet in this splendid new world. After much hard work, a studious avoidance of potatoes and their like, and more than all, perhaps, an inextinguishable zeal, she had succeeded in finding a place in the second hockey eleven as right wing. Her tutors' reports were better than she had expected, though Claudia quoted something rude about praising with faint damns. They all agreed that she was enthusiastic about her work, and seemed to find promise in the future, though Mr Mildmay said she gave too great a preference to the merely literary side of her work, and Mr Zingl remarked that if philology were merely a matter of finding poetic modern English substitutes for Old English words, he would have had reason to be better pleased than at this moment he was.

Still, she had more than two years in front of her, and she meant to make the most of her time. It was strange

how naturally her life at Oxford seemed to join on to those fifteen years in India—it was just as if Castle Holme had never happened at all. Yet it was Castle Holme, after all, that had made it possible for her to come up here and live her own life, independent of the interference and the claims of other people. It wasn't that Uncle James and Aunt Selina hadn't done their best by her, and she was sure she was deeply grateful to them, but she could not make them matter. She had not seen them since October; they were still on the Continent, and did not talk of coming home, now that they knew she had somewhere to go for "the holidays." She was ashamed of feeling glad that their absence enabled her to go on living in this wonderful atmosphere without a break—it absorbed her and satisfied her so completely, and would have been so hard to give up. She could imagine few things more ideal than the reading-party in Devonshire, so near at hand, and she was looking forward to it eagerly.

Her diary for this term contained one entry, and that, like the first entry of all, was a quotation :

"The world is so full of a number of things,
I think we should all be as happy as kings."

CHAPTER XI

THE reading-party seemed at first all that the heart of woman could desire. The beauty of Mallacombe itself was a revelation to Hasil. It lay in a little bay on the rugged Devon coast, like a child asleep in the curve of his father's arm—between cliffs that seemed to frown, but hid bluebells in their crevices. She loved the acres of red earth, sloping up against the sky, with treasures of life-to-be in their womb, the deep lanes, the wonderful orchard hollows, with their glory of rose and white, the lush green meadows of narcissus and daffodil, the brown faces of the fishermen—the mystery of their dark-blue eyes and the moulding of their features hinting of Phœnician forebears. But most of all, she loved the sea. Her window looked over the bay, and the last thing she saw at night was the shining field of ocean, seemingly rebuked of its passion, lying quiescent in the calm virgin gaze of the moon. After a time it seemed to obsess her. It spoke through all her dreams and backgrounded them; sometimes she could almost have said that she heard sea-voices calling her. It became linked with her thoughts and her work, she could taste its salt upon her lips and feel its embrace wrapping her limbs. It seemed to isolate her a little from the others; even Claudia could not quite understand, and they were not as intimate as in the term. As a matter of fact, she was almost over-vitalised at this time, all her faculties and perceptions almost too keenly sensitive. It may

have been that under the strain of the appeal Oxford had made to her personally, the heritage of the East was now for the first time really awake.

However, the routine was peaceful and unvarying, and in some measure acted as an antidote. The reading-party consisted of two other people, besides Claudia and Hasil—Miss Chaplin, a second-year student, who had taken a fancy to them and invited them, and Miss Beauchamp, another “fresher.” The days passed pleasantly, on the whole, sanely divided between work and play, and she revelled in the utter absence of irksome claims upon her time and individuality.

It occurred to her one day, soon after their arrival there, that she had perhaps behaved a trifle discourteously to Mr Harding. It would not do at all if he set her down as unmannerly. She might send him a cold little note which would remove any such idea, and yet succeed in conveying her resentment. She sat down forthwith and wrote it :

“DEAR MR HARDING,—There did not seem time at the end to thank you properly for your kind invitation to the Union. I enjoyed it very much, especially as it was my first debate there. I fear you took my admission of an open mind on the motion more seriously than it was meant, but I have somehow got the impression that you dislike stating your own serious opinions, and therefore were not in earnest in asking me. Yours sincerely,

“HASIL LATHOM.”

It had developed into more than a frigid “Thank you”—still, it should go. She would not read it over

again for fear she should wish to alter it, or not send it at all, and so ran out to the pillar-box at once.

She had not expected he would answer, but in a few days she received the following reply :

“ DEAR MISS LATHOM,—You should not have troubled to thank me. I am very glad you were able to use the ticket. It seems to me that I am in your debt somehow, but I don't quite know how to clear it off. I was most keen to hear your attitude to the motion, and your answer sent me empty away. My reply about my views came after yours—I thought you gave me nothing, so I very magnanimously handed you nothing back. Will it atone for my niggardliness if I tell you that, as a matter of fact, I am entirely in favour of the motion? Perhaps some day we shall be able to discuss it together.

“ I am not sure if your impression of me is correct as a generalisation. If it is, the devil's darling sin is very likely largely responsible.

“ With my best wishes for a pleasant vacation. Yours sincerely,

“ ADRIAN HARDING.”

Hasil read this through several times, and liked it better each time. She liked the thick, square note-paper, and the small and artistic handwriting. She thought he had atoned handsomely. He had deliberately drawn aside the curtain of his reserve because she had seemed annoyed. She was nearly sure she liked him very much.

When she showed the letter to Claudia, as they were walking together, Claudia was really taken aback.

“ Fancy Adrian Harding writing like that,” she com-

mented. "Why, you hardly know him—besides, he doesn't put himself out for women as a rule!"

"I think it's just the fact of his bothering that's so nice," said Hasil. "I suppose he saw I was annoyed and did his best to remedy it."

Claudia uttered one of those sounds which appear in books as "Pshaw!" or "Humph!" or "Bah!" or "Faugh!" but are never said in that form by mortal lips, and hurled a stone somewhat viciously into the sea.

It was shortly after this that the peace of the reading-party seemed less harmonious. It was difficult to put one's finger on it, but the discord was certainly there, and it was constantly becoming apparent in trifling matters. Hasil herself, with all her nerves over-acute, and dimly aware of some great need quickening within her, was irritable and exacting; Claudia did not seem her tranquil self either. Miss Beauchamp, to Hasil's great disgust, showed a decided predilection for Claudia's society—she did not approve of Miss Beauchamp. She was tall and dark and vivacious, with a ready wit and a facile intelligence, and she and Hasil were naturally antagonistic.

"Why do you like Miss Beauchamp?" said Hasil to Claudia one day.

"For lots of reasons, Hasil. She's clever and interesting and amusing. Besides, I think she's like you."

"That's why I hate her," said Hasil sturdily, but could not explain herself further.

The only normal member of the party was Miss Chaplin, who did her best to dispel any hint of friction, but was not always successful.

One afternoon it was raining in a Devonshire way—that is to say, beyond all hope of redemption. They had decided that none of them felt like braving the elements, and had tried to amuse themselves in their rather small sitting-room. Claudia happily suggested toffee-making, and they were all in the flushed and sticky state which the right manufacture of toffee renders inevitable, when the door opened, and their landlady, Mrs Rossiter, appeared with a lady and a clergyman in her wake. Addressing herself to no one in particular, and mumbling some sort of inaudible introduction, she disappeared, leaving the situation to be mutually faced.

“My name is Mrs Dale,” said the lady, in a tone pleasant enough, but, as Claudia said afterwards, “smacking of the bedside manner,” “and as my son is Vicar of Mallacombe, we thought we should like to call on you when we heard you were staying here.”

“How very kind of you,” took up Miss Chaplin nobly. “We don’t know anybody in Mallacombe—some friends of mine stayed here once and thought it would be nice for our reading-party.”

“What work are you doing, then?” asked Mrs Dale.

“Oh, we are all different schools, you know. At least, Miss Beauchamp is History, Miss Lathom and Miss Maxwell are Literature and I am Honour Mods.”

“Very nice, I’m sure,” Mrs Dale replied vaguely, determining to ask her son later what having taught in different schools had to do with it. “But what I really came to ask you is, whether you will all come and have tea with us next Saturday? We live very quietly in this little place, my son and I, and haven’t any attractions to offer visitors, but I am sure he would

be delighted to show you some of the beautiful places near here—wouldn't you, Clement? "

The young man addressed looked up with a "Yes, rather, mother," from a somewhat desultory conversation Hasil and Claudia had done their best to bolster up. They had decided already that he was a good-looking person. His dark hair, rather fine for a man, fell in a broad wave across his forehead, his eyes were clear-blue, and shone with a rather severe light, which harmonised with the general impression of asceticism he managed to convey. It was strange that he should do so, for his brow was as smooth and as white as a child's, and his features boyish and almost too regular. He was quite young—about twenty-eight, perhaps, or thirty. So far no hint of the asceticism had transpired. He had talked quite enthusiastically of toffee and of the vast improvement almonds were, and then they had declined on the intricacies and uncertainties of the weather, comparing and contrasting the Mallacombe variety with others of their respective experiences. His mother's invitation for Saturday was accepted by the reading-party, really because it did not know how to refuse, and dreaded that those stern blue eyes would penetrate through a flimsy excuse. After a little more conversation of the ping-pong type, Mrs Dale rose to go, declining tea on the grounds that they must get home "between the showers."

Hasil, with her usual dread of the most trifling social event, declared that she read the Prayer for Rain nightly, with a view to Saturday, but it turned out a lovely afternoon in her despite, and there was no escape. Mallacombe Vicarage was an old half-timbered house, which seemed to have been added to again and again

at the sweet will of its owners, irrespective of conformity; the effect, if irregular, was charming. The roses were clambering in at the windows and wandering over the walls outside, the soft air coaxing them into thinking it was summer. A white lilac-tree, in full bloom, stood beside the porch, and the garden was full of lilies of the valley, of genista, of stately irises, white and blue. Were the lives of the people who lived here beautiful and fragrant too, Hasil wondered, or were they unsatisfying, as life at Castle Holme had been? That had a beauty of its own, too, but somehow it had held nothing for anyone hungry for living.

Mrs Dale received them graciously. Her son had evidently done his best to fill some of the lacunæ in her mind as to college girls generally. She was primed with information, and speedily discharged a round of ammunition.

“What do you think of Dickens, Miss Maxwell?” she inquired, as she was filling the exquisite old Lowestoft china tea-cups, and Mr Dale was doing his duty with the cakestand. Claudia said she had not read all his novels, and Mrs Dale took heart of grace.

“Haven’t you? Oh, you ought to read ‘The Cloister and the Hearth’—oughtn’t she, Clement? It’s all about the Chartist Riots, you know, and it really gives a splendid picture of London as it was in those days. I can remember walking over Hampstead Heath, and saying to myself: ‘This is just where Bill Sykes murdered poor little Oliver Twist.’ But young people don’t read Dickens nowadays, they consider him old-fashioned, I suppose.”

The unhappy Claudia seemed concerned with a very minute piece of bread and butter to the exclusion of all

other earthly things. Miss Chaplin, coming to the rescue, said that one had to discriminate, because at College one was so busy that something *must* be left out.

"Quite so, quite so," said Mrs Dale; "but it seems to me such a pity that the girls of to-day should neglect Dickens and read Meredith. Frivolous, immoral flummery, I call it, filling their heads with absurd ideas."

Hasil looked at the son. Since they could not, with courtesy, themselves defend the great masters from blame, and from equally dreadful praise, would he not take up the challenge, or did books mean as little to him as they did to his mother?

"You will be making enemies directly, mother," he said quietly, but Hasil fancied he was vexed. "You must be thinking of somebody else. Meredith is a very deep thinker with a most intricate literary style—I scarcely think he would appeal to girls."

So he was of the *He for God only, she for God in him* order of young man! Perhaps they might teach him something.

"I think 'Richard Feverel' greater than 'Romeo and Juliet'—don't you?" said Hasil, turning to him. "At least, I often find myself thinking Shakespeare wrote them both."

"I can't understand that," he replied. "But they are certainly alike in teaching the great moral truth, that Love, and not passion, has the quality of permanence."

"But how ever do you distinguish?" she asked.

"There is a very great difference," he answered, reddening. Then he turned to his mother and asked

if she would not like to show their visitors the garden. Mrs Dale departed to fetch her hat.

"My mother does too much good among the poor people here to have a great deal of time for books," he said; then, facing them all, "but she has more wisdom than books could have taught her, I think."

In some embarrassment they did their best to assure him that it must be splendid to work among the poor.

"She is nervous of college girls," he went on. "We've lived here so long, and except for me, she has no one to talk to about books and things, and I really get very little time now from my parish work."

. . . "You can't help liking him," said Hasil, as they walked home down the steep sea-lane, laden with flowers.

"I can't stand either of them," Freda Beauchamp exclaimed. "He's a dreadful prig, and he'll be just like his mother, when he's her age."

"He's young, that's all," Hasil replied, from the height of her twenty years; "young and very sure of himself. But he's absolutely sincere, and I liked the way he stuck up for his mother—she needed sticking up for, though, didn't she?"

"But, Hasil," broke in Claudia, "surely you thought he was nearly as bad himself about Meredith?"

"No; because it is the result of a consistent attitude of mind," she answered. "Mrs Dale's was just a blind attempt to talk to us in the language she thought we'd best understand. He's read Meredith, and I should say he admires him, but he's in the ascetic stage, when his one desire, probably, is to be eaten on toast by the Hugger-Mugger niggers."

"They were both very kind to us, I think," said

gentle Miss Chaplin. "I like Mrs Dale, and she must have been very pretty when she was a girl."

"You find something nice to say of everyone, don't you, grannie?" Claudia laughed, and the conversation dropped.

The next evening Claudia and Hasil decided to go to church and see what the Reverend Clement was like when his foot was, as it were, upon his native heath. He looked younger than ever as he stood in the pulpit, his face flushed with the nervous excitement he had not yet overcome, and the candles lighting up his blue eyes. His text was from Matthew: "But let your communication be yea, yea; nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."

He dwelt on the uselessness and sinfulness of expletives, he dwelt on the need for saying as much as, and no more than, we mean; he pointed out that out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh, that if our thoughts are pure and restrained and decisive, our speech will be so too. It was all very earnest, very true and very young. It strengthened their conviction that he was very nice, but had a lot to learn; but Hasil, watching him, thought, almost unconsciously, that perhaps Milton had looked something like him when he was at Cambridge, and they had called him "The Lady of Christ's."

They saw a good deal of him during the remainder of their time at Mallacombe. He seemed to like being with them, and to enjoy showing them the country he loved. Mrs Dale said she was delighted for him to have young people to talk to, and as she did not care about walking much, they probably got to know Clement better than they would have done otherwise.

They all called him Clement, but Claudia and Hasil knew him better than the other two, perhaps because they understood him better. They teased him immeasurably, and told him it was for his soul's good. Claudia imitated his pulpit manner to the life, and Hasil used to provoke him to fervour by saying something deliberately pagan, and then tranquilly add : " All right, padre, I only wanted to rouse John Knox in you."

On the whole, he took it in very good part, nor was the teaching wholly one-sided. They could not help admiring his single-heartedness, the purity and simplicity of his life, and his devotion to his mother. They saw that his belief, whatever they might think of it, had brought him peace of heart, and to Hasil's eager and impetuous spirit his religion seemed a very calm and soothing thing—fragrant, like the white lilac-tree. She was not sure whether she wanted it for herself or not.

They were all agreed on one thing at the end of their five weeks—that they had not known how companionable a man might be. " Though I couldn't live at Mallacombe Vicarage if you paid me," concluded Miss Beauchamp.

CHAPTER XII

THE terms passed swiftly away, as is their wont after the long strangeness of the first two. Who shall tell of the joy of the June term, when schools belong to the misty future, and wild roses would appear to be the most important things in the world? It was in her first summer term that Hasil found fritillaries, white or strangely speckled mauve, thick-growing in the Hinksey meadows.

"They seem out of place in England," she said, "they ought to be growing in India."

For all her love of England, she was beginning, with her maturity, to hear the call of the East. The saneness and sweetness of intellectual ideals as she saw them at Oxford steadied and restrained her, but at the same time growing daily, as she was, towards better appreciation of great art, her work could not but stimulate her passions and emotions. It mirrored the nature-world for her as she could not have seen it for herself, and the nature-world reacted in its turn upon her understanding of literature. There was a hunger in her which sought to be satisfied, and she threw herself eagerly into her work and play, not knowing how to still it. The only time she could have said she felt at peace was in the garden at night. The first night she carried out her bed she found it impossible to sleep—it seemed an impertinence in the face of that great shining heaven. Sleep came in broken snatches,

and she awakened each time with a sense of dread, and thought it was so that Wordsworth felt on Esthwaite Lake, when the mountain seemed to pursue him. But later, that in her nature which was essential asserted itself, and she realised, as no English girl could have done, that she was part of that miracle overhead, detached now, but some day to be united and absorbed. With that thought came the most peaceful sleeping she had ever known, or would ever know.

Very little occurred to break the routine of that first summer term. One day towards the end, she had, rather to her surprise, a letter from Clement Dale, enclosing some photos he had taken in April of the reading-party.

“I should have sent them to you long ago [he wrote], but my mother was married at the end of May to a Major Lascelles we have always known, who has now retired from the army. You can imagine there was a great deal to be done, and so will forgive me. I feel very lonely in Mallacombe Vicarage without her, but it is good to think of her happiness.”

There was no word of selfishness, no hint of his disapproval of second marriages, though she felt instinctively that he would feel it to militate against loyalty to his dead father, and against his own deepest convictions. She was touched that he had written to let them know, though she could not imagine why it should have been to her rather than Claudia, and replied in as sympathetic a letter as she could. She was quite fond of him.

Almost instinctively, her thoughts travelled to the

other of the two men she knew. She had seen Adrian Harding two or three times at Mrs Granville's—once he had taken her in to dinner there, and once she had met him at a picnic the Granvilles had arranged. She felt now that she was on the way to understanding him; his attitude was a mask, by way of defending the very shy, easily wounded self, who dwelt behind it. She had seen him so silent that it was impossible to rouse or interest him, while another day he had been sarcastic and cynical, treating everything she said lightly, and seeming to hold nothing seriously himself, and she had gone home mortified and hurt, very near returning to her original idea that she did not like him.

The evening he had taken her in he had sung afterwards, this time "The Bedouin Love Song." The hackneyed words and air took on a new meaning for her—she saw the passionate flight of lover and horse across the desert, heard the man's quick breathing as he stood beneath his beloved's window in the light of an Eastern moon, swearing his love would last till sun and stars were done. Harding had forgotten himself, it was one of the things that attracted her most in his singing. When he was talking to her he was self-conscious, somehow, not quite natural, but when he sang he let his song have its way. As the last chords vibrated something stirred in her and said quite plainly: "How good to be loved by a man like Adrian Harding!" It was almost as if the words had been spoken aloud, and she crimsoned to the roots of her hair. On her way back to college she took herself to task. "You are in a bad way, Hasil," she admonished; "it would be revolting if you really cared for this person, but as a matter of fact, I don't believe you do. You say

yourself he is self-conscious, you know his moods madden you sometimes, and *I* consider him rather conceited. Moreover, he himself is completely indifferent to your very existence; but no doubt that does not matter to people capable of thinking as you do."

She felt better after that, and made up her mind that she had let herself be carried away by the song to a ridiculous extent.

At the end of the term she was asked by Miss Lethbridge to be a delegate at the approaching students' conference at Cambridge. Every denomination was to be represented, and delegates, both men and women, from India, China, Japan and all parts of the world would speak on the work that was being done in the name of Christianity. She had a very sincere liking for Miss Lethbridge, and it seemed a very good opportunity for knowing more about the things that seemed to matter so much to people like her and Clement Dale. Up till now Hasil's attitude to the movement in college had been non-committal; without exactly holding aloof, she had not in any way identified herself with it.

She wrote to her uncle and aunt, asking if she might go, and Uncle James replied from Switzerland that as he was still under doctor's orders not to return, she might go where she pleased, provided she was well looked after.

The conference lasted a week. The greater part of every day was given over to addresses and prayer meetings, and she had nothing to do but listen and look on, criticising as much as she pleased. They were people of magnificent calibre, these speakers; there was no hysteria, no merely morbid self-revelations, nothing but simple unaffected statements about the

great work they were doing, and what it meant in their lives. One of the speakers who impressed her most was president of the boats in his college; she had met him at the Granvilles', and thought how manly and unaffected he was, not dreaming of this, his deepest self, which he was so generously revealing for the good of his cause.

She came to know some of the others a little, too, in that short week, and realised that though their lives were utterly selfless, yet they were completely happy. She felt herself drawn to the service of that Master who promised for gift the peace that passeth all understanding. He seemed to satisfy her woman-need, somehow to respond to that craving of hers for love and the need to give herself. He was not an abstraction—He had been a baby, a child, a young man. And yet—as a religion, Christianity seemed lifeless to her. It left depths in her all unplumbed, hunger unsatisfied.

"It's all very well for you," she said to one dear soul who came and sat on her bed one night and asked her if she could not decide to declare herself for Christ. "It is real to you—it's what you want. It doesn't really touch me. I see how happy it makes you and how beautiful your lives are, but it wouldn't do that to me. It would make me *hellish*."

"That's because you don't see it and understand it rightly," said Miss Blackmore quietly.

"Probably; but, in any case, I want a religion that is just as beautiful outside as it is within. I want flowers and light and music and colour—to make a joyful noise before the Lord. Your whitewashed rooms full of badly dressed people who can't sing and look as if they hadn't enough to eat—— Oh, I don't want

to hurt you, but I *can't* do with it for myself. Besides, why isn't every religion a path leading to God? We may be only calling the same thing by different names."

Miss Blackmore shook her head. "Christ told His disciples to go and preach the Gospel to *all* nations," she said. "He wouldn't have done that if other beliefs were as good." But Hasil remained profoundly unconvinced.

The rest of the vacation she spent at Claudia's home in Suffolk, an old rambling place, standing a few miles inland, near the river Ald. Mrs Maxwell had died at Claudia's birth, and Mr Maxwell lived alone with Claudia, his only child. It had been a great wrench to part with her, but he had thought her brain deserved the good things he had had himself, and sent her to Oxford. He was a delightful person, gentle and scholarly, with a shrewd intuition for which people did not always allow sufficiently. Hasil felt she understood Claudia much better because of him. For three wonderful summer months they worked and walked and talked. They sailed boats on the Ald, and they bathed at Aldeburgh, the nearest seaside place. It was here that Hasil really swam in the sea, and she could hardly be induced to leave it.

"I am not Hasil," she said; "I am a wave or a fish, or even foam on the wave. I haven't any business on land."

It was a good time. They were much more intimate than boys would have been at their age, because so much more innocent, and they stored up for themselves memories sweet as lavender for the less happy time to come.

The Michaelmas term came, and with its waning, the

mists and cold. Life seemed just a little flat in December, the exaltation of the beginning had had time to cool, there was not enough colour in the world, and Hasil was feeling depressed and unsettled. Again she had nowhere to go for her vacation, and although, as soon as people knew, the whole time was filled with invitations, it was not the same thing, and not nearly as good for her work.

But with the spring term her heart grew lighter. They spoke well of her work now, and one never-to-be-forgotten day Mr Mildmay hinted vaguely, ever so vaguely, at the possibilities of a First next year if she maintained her own standard. She trod on air, and, during another reading-party up in Yorkshire, worked nine hours a day, and could be with difficulty prevailed on to take a decent amount of exercise. She had something to work for, she said, and the moors, wonderful as they were, generally called to her in vain. The truth was that her womanhood was awake in earnest, asking its due with all the force and passion of an Eastern nature. Hasil, hardly understanding, dimly ashamed, realised that in the poetry of the great masters there was something that satisfied, if it did not silence; and, for the rest, hard work at philology was like strenuous physical labour for the muscles, tiring and numbing the brain. Something prevented her from sharing this half-knowledge with Claudia: Claudia seemed so tranquil, so untroubled. She was a poppy, and Claudia a lily.

But Claudia herself, meanwhile, was, as a matter of fact, going through a very rough process of soul-making, and reserved as she was, something of it would have been evident to Hasil had she not been so en-

grossed with her own affairs. Claudia had been attracted to Harding at their first meeting. She had the mother-instinct very strongly developed, and she felt that she understood him, and could help him to know himself and his world better. She was no mean musician, and realised, even more than Hasil, how much music meant to him. What she had suspected ever since Mallacombe had now become a certainty, she was sure that Harding cared for Hasil, and was only waiting his opportunity to speak. She was no coward, and she had some of the finest blood in England in her veins, so she resolutely put her dream aside, permitting herself to dwell only on the possibility of Hasil's happiness. But her path was not easy going, and for all the calm tranquillity Hasil almost envied, her eyes had very dark circles under them at times, and she seemed to find it necessary to work later at night than she used to do, and was less like her old gay self.

In the summer term Hasil was seeing Harding constantly. Mrs Granville had guessed for some time how the land lay, and thoroughly relished the idea of playing *deus ex machina* to a happening so much after her own heart. Hasil was overwhelmed with invitations to the little house in Peter's Lane, to picnics on the river, to dinners and to teas on college barges in Eights' Week. She was more peaceful now, floating, as it were, on the great river of a happiness of which she hardly dared to think. The term before, the Hilary term, she had guessed she need no longer reproach herself for anything her heart might say about Harding. He had sought her out so often, she so rarely saw now any but his real self, and sometimes his eyes rested on her face as if they found it very good to do so.

She knew him very little, and yet she felt she had always known him. She had really chosen him from that Sunday, as he sat at the piano; most gladly would she put her life between his hands, to do as he willed with it.

One Saturday afternoon in early June they had been at one of the frequent river-picnics organised by Mrs Granville. They had landed for tea, and when it was over and it was getting late, Mrs Granville, declaring she needed no help with the tea-things, had commissioned them to go and tell her husband—who had strolled off, and was probably, as she said, “pondering pluperfects,” oblivious of all beside—that it was time to be going home. Sheila and Doreen were most anxious to accompany them, but were bribed by a promise that they should finish up all the tomato sandwiches. So it came about that Harding presently took Hasil’s hand quietly in his, and asked :

“Do you think you could get to care for me in time, little Hasil?”

And Hasil looked up at him and said : “I think I have always cared for you.”

Then the grass was greener than she had ever seen it, and “the unattainable blue flower of the sky” more marvellously blue, and she never knew whether the birds or their own hearts were making the sweetest music in the world. Adrian was telling her that she scarcely knew him, that he was a sullen fellow, with nothing to offer anyone so wonderful as Hasil, except his great love. But she could not listen. Just as her mother had given herself to Lathom, wholly and unquestioningly, all those years ago, so her daughter, once and for all, took Harding for her man, and all

the forces of civilisation and culture that might have modified her giving were broken down and neutralised.

They went back presently to Mrs Granville, to find, to their shame, that it had struck even Mr Granville that it was getting late. It was impossible to hide things from the merry little Irishwoman, their faces betrayed them. They took her into their confidence, only making it a stipulation that she should tell nobody. Adrian's father was away from England, and as Hasil's people, too, knew nothing of the matter, they thought it better for every reason to keep the engagement secret for a time.

Adrian took her back to St Frideswide's. They laughed over two undergraduates whose bicycles collided in the middle of the road opposite Balliol, and whose faces were eloquent of all the bad language they did not utter. They spoke of *Campaspe*, which was to be acted in the beautiful gardens of Worcester College, and Adrian told her of the Greek play at Bradfield he was going to see. They did not talk at all of the wonderful thing that had happened to them.

He left her at the gate, and crossing the garden, she met Claudia, clearing away the remains of the tea-party.

"Had a good time?" she asked.

"Yes; it was splendid," said Hasil quietly, and went indoors.

"Her happiness shone right through her," thought Claudia, "just as if the sun were shining behind her. I think he has told her."

Hasil would have liked to tell Claudia, but Adrian had been very anxious that it should be kept secret from everyone but Mrs Granville, and she comforted herself

by reflecting that it could not be for very long. His father was expected back in July or August, and once he knew, and Uncle James and Aunt Selina knew, there could be no longer any reason for secrecy. Meanwhile, as Hasil told her nothing, Claudia could not speak.

The rest of the term passed in a golden dream. She longed to be alone all the time with her thoughts, yet it was very sweet after a crowded day to shut herself in with her happiness. She felt that she prized it the more for having to wait for it, as the mother who is obliged to be busy with irksome duties and obligations thinks tenderly of the baby she has left, who will welcome her with his soft kisses when she returns to him.

She saw Adrian again on the Sunday, and then they parted. She hoped that Uncle James would be induced to ask him down very soon to Castle Holme, and planned all sorts of walks on the Downs, or through the meadows, spacious and open as only Sussex meadows can be. For she was really going to Castle Holme. Uncle James and Aunt Selina had been back since May, and she was going to spend practically all the Long Vacation there. She wondered how it would seem to her now. She could hardly believe she was the same Hasil Lathom who had told Miss Caxton she did not know what to make of her life—so many things had happened since she went away that October day. She felt different in herself, she had someone to live for. And she had told Adrian she wanted to go on just the same, and take her schools in the following June, and he had understood and agreed.

“But after that, I sha’n’t wait any longer, little girl,” he had said. “I shall carry you off some time

in the Long Vacation, and keep you for ever. "Where shall we go?—Italy, Greece, where? It won't matter to me where in the wide world, with you beside me!"

And she had laughed and said there was plenty of time to think of that, and of whether they would live at Oxford, or whether he would settle down in the country and devote himself to politics. She knew that he would some day inherit his father's place in Surrey—he was an only child, as she was.

She could not think about the future, she wanted to live in every minute of the present. She only knew that she was utterly happy—the Fairy Prince had found his way through the briers after all.

CHAPTER XIII

HASIL could never have said why she did not immediately tell her uncle and aunt that Adrian Harding had asked her to be his wife. It may have been that she wanted to keep it to herself, unshared, a little while; it may have been from some feeling that she would not speak till Adrian's father knew of, and sanctioned, the engagement; at all events, she said nothing definite at Castle Holme.

"Good gracious, child, how changed you are," said Aunt Selina the first evening; "surely you've grown?"

Hasil did not think she had, and Uncle James said she looked older altogether, and that was probably the reason. They both agreed that the change was for the better.

"We feared you might have lost all thought for your personal appearance, my dear," Uncle James commented. "I am very glad to find that development of intellect does not necessarily entail an utter disregard of one's person."

It was not until next morning, as Aunt Selina was filling up the flower bowls with water, that she suddenly asked:

"Was there anyone at Oxford you liked at all, Hasil dear?"

The little sentimental quaver in her voice, the way she resolutely kept her eyes on the flowers, assured Hasil of her meaning, and she answered:

"Well, auntie, I think there *was*, since you ask me, but I'd rather not say anything about it just yet, even to you."

Aunt Selina thought that here was a maiden secret surprised into consciousness, and, like the dear old lady she was, did nothing but gently kiss Hasil's blushing face, and whisper: "I hope you'll be very happy, dear, when the time comes."

Did any girl ever before have such a marvellous gift as Adrian's love? Were there ever such letters since the world's beginning? The words themselves glowed and shone, and each letter was a lyric. She could never read them indoors, no place of walls could be large enough. She took them to the haunts she used to love and had not forgotten—the beech avenue—the little pond, willow-screened, in the meadows behind the house—the deep hedges, crowned now with their fragrant honeysuckle, in which one was sheltered beyond all guess of passer-by.

The uplifting knowledge within her made everybody seem welcome. She accompanied her aunt to functions she used to loathe, and wondered she had found them tedious. The flower show, the Vicar's garden-party, the prize-giving at the village school—they were all interesting. Miss Royston, a little older and more faded, seemed to ask mutely for her sympathy and affection. What had she, Hasil, done to be so blest, when people like Miss Royston had lives so grey and monotonous? She helped Uncle James in the garden very often now, loving to feel the kiss of the flowers as she worked among them, glorying in the beauty of the summer days.

And then there were the summer nights, when the

sky was a pageant of stars, and she leant from her window and drew in the fragrance of the night-time. Everything was loved and loving : she was one of that host of lovers. The song of her heart mingled with the sound of the little stream near by, the scent of the honeysuckle and meadowsweet, and the pale glow of the tall evening primroses, to make one Love Anthem. (Surely in summer, time of fulfilment, rather than spring, the time of promise, "Half of the world a bridegroom is, and half of the world a bride!")

The days passed so quickly, she hardly knew July had grown into August, till she woke up one morning to realise that it was her twenty-first birthday! She went downstairs to find her place at the breakfast-table heaped with parcels, and to receive the rather solemn embraces of her uncle and aunt. She could not feel this day, the tenth of August, as important in itself as they did, it was this *year* that was marked for ever with a white stone, this *year* in which she stood on the threshold of a new world.

After breakfast her uncle called her into the study. She hoped he would be quick. She had had his present already—a beautiful little watch—and she wanted to get away and see what Adrian had said to her. He was taking a long sealed envelope from his desk with his usual deliberate movements.

"Your father wished you to have this on your twenty-first birthday, Hasil, my dear," he said, handing it to her. "I am ignorant of its contents, but I undertook to give it to you."

She took it in a blinding mist of tears. If only *he* could have been here to share her happiness! She could have talked to him a little, he would have under-

stood. She would read it after she had read Adrian's letter; it would be good to read together on this day messages from the two men she loved.

Adrian had sent her the engagement ring. "My father has not returned yet, sweetheart," he wrote, "but I want you to have my ring to-day, though you must not wear it till I come and put it on myself. You said opals were your favourite stones, so I have chosen opals. You know they are said to be unlucky, but *my* birthday is in the opal month, October, so perhaps that will do as well. Besides, what has love to do with luck? . . ."

The ring was of four exquisite opals plainly set, and he could have given her nothing she could have loved more. In the heart of the stones were flames, shot through and through with cloudy colour, now paling, now deepening, but glowing always, like a lover's thoughts. She slipped it on her finger, and watched it catch the sun-rays with an almost childish joy. Then she read her letter to the end.

With fingers that trembled a little, as she saw the superscription on the envelope in her father's handwriting *To be opened by Hasil Lathom on her twenty-first birthday*, she broke the seal and drew out the letter within :

"MY LITTLE DAUGHTER,—A very happy birthday to you ! I would give so much to see you as you read this letter, and to kiss your face. It may be that I am near you, who knows? I wonder if you think sometimes of your father, if you are like him? Poor little maid ! You are young to have been fatherless and motherless so long, but Selina will have been kind to you, I think.

“ I want to tell you about your mother, Hasil. No one has told you about her, and you have no photo of her. I think it is right that you should know now that she was a native woman of high caste, whose parents died at Goomi, while they were on a pilgrimage to the great temple there—(you won't remember it). Their little daughter was left friendless, and the village people gave her some sort of a home. But their rough ways and their rough treatment made no difference to her : she was of the hills, and nothing can change that. She was beautiful, Hasil ; her mind was beautiful and her body was beautiful, and she was just seventeen when I married her. Slender and tall for an Eastern woman, with a shy proud grace and the most wonderful eyes in the world, and features delicate as old ivory. Her name was Jasoda. She died when you were born, in the first year of our marriage. We were very, very happy together, and your name—Hasil—means ‘ Harvest,’ for we thought of you as the fulfilment of our love. She was more of a spirit than a woman, more gentle, more refined than any other woman I have ever known. Her presence brought blessing and peace always.

“ I have waited till your twenty-first birthday to tell you this because you might not have understood it all sooner. Some people will tell you that your mother should have been a white woman, and count it for a slur to you, but I think you will not heed them. I do not fear for you, whatever may happen, for you are her daughter and mine.

“ YOUR FATHER.”

This letter, so characteristic of Lathom in its appreci-

ation of Jasoda on the one hand, and its utter disregard of practical consequence on the other, seemed to Hasil to bring the dead very near to her. It was as if they both stood by her, greeting her lovingly and tenderly as their child. No hint of what the issues involved might be occurred to her for a moment, her father's revelation caused her nothing but joy. This, then, was why she had felt out of place at Castle Holme! This was why the East had called her so insistently! The passionate beauty and colour that had always attracted her were her rightful heritage—she had a glorious ancestry! She saw them, those women of the hills, tall and slim and dark-eyed, as her father had said, with their very speech lyrical and melodious, fiercely chaste until they loved, and then laying down their lives in a passionate humility, prouder than pride, at the feet of the men they chose. Let people say what they would! Adrian would understand, would rejoice with her, so would Claudia. She did not think she would tell anybody else. Her uncle and aunt never asked about her mother, knowing she knew no more than they did. She must tell them something about her father's letter, and they would not question her further if they saw she did not wish to show it to them. She thought of her beautiful girl-mother in a passion of tenderness, she would not suffer the idyll of her parents' love for each other to run the risk of misunderstanding in the grip of the world's coarse thumb and finger. It should be a wonderful secret shared with Adrian and perhaps Claudia.

At lunch she said: "Father's letter was a birthday letter. He told me a little about mother too—how beautiful she was, and how he loved her."

"Nothing else?" said Uncle James, noting Hasil's tear-stained face, and thinking that if that were all Lathom would have been wiser not to upset the child on her birthday.

"No, uncle; nothing else," Hasil answered. She felt as if she were being dishonest, but she was obstinately determined not to tell them. She felt certain they would not understand, and she could not bear their comments on a thing so sacred to her. It was all so long ago, and she did not see how it could affect anybody but herself.

That night, sitting at her window, with the ash-tree throwing delicate moon-shadows across the paper, she began a long letter to Adrian:

"BELOVED!—I have been so happy to-day with your beautiful ring. You were right to give me opals—they are your love for me and mine for you, always glowing, though the quality changes. It only wanted that you should come and put it on my hand yourself, but perhaps that would have been too much happiness. Your letter seemed to wrap me round as royally as a queen's mantle, and made me many thousand times happier than a mere queen! Your love crowns me always, I feel like the beggar girl who was suddenly transformed into the princess. I try to tell you what I feel, but all the words are cold and wooden, and I can't alter them. A great purple splash of colour would express me best, but you would grumble if that were all the letter I sent you. But then it isn't your twenty-first birthday, and I am not you, so I don't see anyway how you could expect a letter which would be anything like an answer to the one you sent me this morning.

“This has been a wonderful day altogether, dear one. Uncle James gave me a letter from father, written when he knew he couldn't live very long, and greeting me on my twenty-first birthday. I would send it to you, but I can't bear to part with it just yet. He told me something I could never have guessed, something that made me very happy, and is, after yours, the best birthday gift of all. You know how I love India, Adrian—all the colour and passion of it? It is because mother was a native herself, and I never knew! Father has told me in this letter about her. He married her when she was seventeen, and she died the year after, when I was born. He says she was tall and slender, and had wonderful eyes, and he speaks of their great happiness in each other's love. He writes: 'She was more of a spirit than a woman, more gentle, more refined than any woman I have ever known. Her presence brought blessing and peace always.' Isn't she wonderful to think of, dearest? She was of the hills, you see, high caste and pure bred. I think they would have been very glad to know about us—perhaps they do.

“Can you guess how I am longing for you? There is so much I want to tell you, and I can't write it down on paper. Perhaps by now your father is with you, and when I hear he knows I shall tell my uncle and aunt. But as long as there is nothing to be gained by speaking, I shall treasure my secret alone, as I treasure your ring.

“Every day our love seems a more unbelievable thing. It seems to me so strange to realise that there can be any one event which has power to change the whole current of our life, to turn the most ordinary and

monotonous commonplaces into pure gold. It is unbelievable, too, to think that three years ago I did not know you, had not even heard your name; but, somehow, I think we have known each other all through the ages. Perhaps you were a cave-man, who came and carried me off from the lonely little cave where I was happy, and wouldn't listen to my protests. I am sure that afterwards 'You were a King in Babylon, and I was a Christian slave.' At least, was I a *Christian* slave? I am not so sure. But you were a King in Babylon, and I was a slave girl of sorts, who sometimes turned faint for joy as your trailing king-robcs touched me in passing, and sometimes nearly put poison in your wine cup—perhaps *did* put it, one day! If we hadn't æons of mutual knowing to guide us, how should I be sure that you are my man? I would go with you to the world's end and step quite happily off the edge I used to think there was, if we were hand-in-hand. You can do what you will with my life, because I give it you as the best thing I have, the only thing. If you could dissolve it and drink it off, like Cleopatra's pearl, it would not matter—loving you, I should have lived. It isn't enough to be loved by you, though that is a great glory. But I must love you, spend myself loving you, and somehow I think it is as somebody says, that always it is the woman who loves and the man who is loved, for all he talks about it! Sometimes I wish it could go on like this for ever, Adrian. It will be glorious when we are married, and can be as much together as we want, and share each other's hopes and beliefs more than we can now; but it will be different from this, and I can't bear to let this beautiful thing go, even for greater beauty. Aren't I greedy? But

you see I've always been starved before, and it's just *those* children who are the greediest when they get food, for fear of wasting time. I've been without you for twenty-and-a-bit solid years, and that is a respectable proportion of one's life, Mr Harding. Now I have you, I want to spin it all out, and have as much of it as I can, in that state of mind which sets 'the budding rose above the rose full blown.'

"The old church bell has just struck—what do you think? THREE! Uncle James would burst into a regular Miltonic ode if he knew. I told you, didn't I of his commination lyric on my reading in bed? I hope you won't be faddy like Uncle James. If you are, I shall respect you, but not love you, and you won't find that entirely satisfactory!

"It seems unintelligent and unsympathetic to go to bed when the world is just ready to get up, fresh and rosy, with dewdrops in her hair, but I suppose I had better. Ought I to kiss you good-night or good-morning? I really don't know, so I think you shall have both, to be on the safe side.

"I can smell the sea.

"HASIL."

CHAPTER XIV

It was on the evening of the same day whose dawning Hasil had thought so fair, that Adrian Harding was pacing up and down the drive of the Old Hall, his father's house in Surrey, reading her letter.

Judging by his expression, you would have said his thoughts were anything but pleasant. There were no lover-like smiles at the playful tone of her letter, a playfulness that hid a strong underlying passion, easy for him to read between the lines; his face was set and white, and all the lines about his mouth were hard. He read the letter through once more, and then flung away his cigar, uttering a "Damn" of so much more import than usual that one of the stablemen, passing at the moment, told his wife over the evening meal that "Mr Adrian was ter'ble put out about something or nuther—'twarnt hardly like a Christian damn, that warnt."

Adrian reached the top of the drive, and stood looking around him in the fading light. The house fronted him in its Elizabethan dignity, with its wealth of honourable tradition. Queen Elizabeth had slept there, on a journey to the south of England, and a cedar on the lawn, planted by her own royal hand, commemorated the fact. A Harding had commanded one of the ships against the ill-fated Armada, and, long before, there had been a Harding at Chevy Chase, and a Harding at Agincourt. In the reign of Charles the First the loyalty of the Harding family was so zealous that after the Royal

Martyr's death the then Adrian Hardyng was forbidden by the Commonwealth, fearing his influence in conspiracy, to go a distance of more than twenty miles from his manor for the rest of his life, on pain of death. Steadily through the ages one Harding had passed the word on to another to keep the family honour as untarnished as the great sword which hung now above the chimneypiece in the hall, with the old motto, "Durante," engraved on the hilt. There was not one blot on the scutcheon, and the family had continued in unbroken line from father to son.

All around him was the beautiful parkland, playground for the timid deer who grazed there, and for the famous white peacocks, long since a-bed in the cedar top. At his back was the lake, starred now with yellow and white water lilies, where Turner had fished, when he was staying with Adrian's grandfather, and painting the exquisite water-colour which still hung in the gallery. Below him was the little village with its one steep street, its quaint old half-timbered cottages jostling one another, like school children nudging each other to make their bob to the Old Hall, the chatelaine who towered beneficently, if haughtily, above them. He thought of the house itself—its old dark rooms and hangings, its picture gallery with countless pictures of dead-and-gone Hardings, its Vandykes, Murillos, Romneys—its old Italian gardens behind the house, hushed with secrets of long-past years, haunted by the powder and patches, the brocade and high heels of vanished centuries. It was as if they all united in one voice: "You cannot do this thing!"

His father had been against his remaining at Oxford after he had taken his M.A., but he had persuaded him

that it was only for a time, that the Hardings had always been scholars as well as soldiers, and that he would be ready to take his place when he should be wanted. The Harding prosperity had fallen on evil days, and it was no longer possible to keep up the style that would have rejoiced his father's heart, but there had always been a Harding in Parliament, and the name still carried weight.

In asking Hasil to be his wife, he had seen no reason why she should not play the part with grace and dignity. She had told him of her uncle and aunt, and her father had evidently been a man of poetic temperament and cultured tastes. How could he have done this abominable thing? He saw Hasil's point of view of course. It was beautiful of her to think of it as she did, but she betrayed an utter ignorance of the world and its demands, of life and its demands. How could a Harding take to wife any but an Englishwoman, how could he breed sons whose blood was tainted? With the hateful knowledge he possessed, even Hasil's love for him, her expression of it, at all events, seemed less satisfying, more open to censure. Was it a less beautiful thing than he had thought it? Was there perhaps a hint of the voluptuous abandonment to love that was more Oriental than English? He found himself with a sudden value for the shy blush of thoroughbred English seventeen, for the uncommunicativeness which may be reserve, and may be merely the result of having nothing to communicate. Better ice in a wife than too much fire !

Then, like a tidal wave, the remembrance of Hasil, lifting up her face for a kiss at their good-bye, as a child might have done, flooded over it all, and he

groaned aloud. He was desperate—he did not mean a word of it. She was his little white dove, come what may, with her starry eyes and the magnetic presence of her.

For three miserable hours he paced up and down, trying to see some solution, seeing none. His thoughts always brought him back to the same point—he could not bring Hasil to rule at Old Hall, among these ancestors of his who had nothing to be ashamed of. Should he throw it all up, and go with her away somewhere, perhaps back to India? He tried to put his own feeling out of sight. It would break his father's heart, it would break his mother's heart. They were old, and he was their only child. He was a Harding and must pay the price. But all through the contest the strongest foe to Hasil's happiness was the fact that the man himself set such a premium on the feudal ideal of name and fame. In spite of the serious fever of Socialism he had contracted in his second term at Oxford, there was that caste-passion in him which is responsible for the worst excesses of the French Revolution. He realised this, not without a certain pride—what he did not remember was that the Brahmin, whose only meal for the day is a chupatti and a little water, will fling that meal away unhesitatingly if the shadow of a European so much as falls across it.

He strode into the house. His mother was just crossing the hall, and the disappointment on her face changed into gladness as she saw him.

"I thought I should have to go to bed without saying good-night to you, Adrian dear," she said, as she saw him. "How tired you look! Have you been for a very long walk?"

"No, mother; I had a great deal of thinking to do, that's all," he said shortly. Then, as he saw the wistfulness of her eyes, he bent down to kiss her.

"It isn't anything you can help me with, dear—I'm just between the devil and the deep sea. I suppose most of us are, once in our lives."

She drew him into the morning-room, which opened off the hall. It was her special sanctum, and quite different from any other room in the house. Here one escaped the Harding atmosphere. The pictures on the walls were few and of many schools, you knew that the sole reason they were there was that one person loved them. There was an Andrea del Sarto, "The Avenue of Middelharnis," a large photograph of Rodin's "Le Baiser," Whistler's mother, and one or two landscapes from the Academy exhibitions of recent years, a Clausen, a Simon Bussy. By the window was her little writing-table, with its one photograph, Adrian as a baby of eighteen months, and its Nankin bowl that was never suffered to be empty of flowers. Above it her shelf of six books—"Jane Eyre," "The Imitation of Christ," Shelley, the Browning Letters, and a volume of Heine. Then there was her piano—she was a gifted musician—and a gate-table of oak that had been given her by one of the old men in the cottages down the hill, because she had liked it. Adrian knew the room well—the walls of pale lavender, the fireplace with its Morris tiles, filled now with heather and bracken, the Bikanir carpet. He never quite understood it, all the same. His mother seemed different in it, more entirely his mother, a little less entirely his father's wife. Whenever she wanted to talk to him secure of interruption, it was always in here. He remembered how she had

drawn him in, just so gently, in the few minutes that remained before he left home for the first time for Eton.

"What is it, my son?" she asked him now. "Are you so sure I can be of no use?"

"I don't think so, mother," he said again. "I don't think anybody could be any use." Then, because she was a woman, and so was Hasil, he took a little leather case from his pocket and showed it to her. It was a portrait of Hasil he had asked her to have taken at Oxford, a much happier Hasil than usual, with lips that wanted to tremble into a smile of pure joy, though in the deep dark eyes there seemed somehow a shadow behind the gladness, and the poise of the head was unconsciously appealing, wistful.

"What do you think of it?" was all he said.

"She is charming, Adrian—very charming," answered his mother after a pause. And, in the infinite wisdom of mothers, said no more, but stroked his hand quietly and waited.

"Mother, I want to marry her." He had to say it; a man in his pain turns instinctively to his mother, if he turns to anyone, remembering the rare days of illness in childhood, when she was the only one who could be tolerated at all, under circumstances so humiliating to a fellow.

"What do you mean, Adrian? Doesn't she care for you?" The tone implied: "Do you mean to say she dares not to care?"

"Oh yes; she cares for me right enough, but there's something about her history, her parents—I can't go into it, but I can't think only of myself."

"No, darling; you must think of her. I don't know

the facts and can't advise you. But I know you wouldn't choose anybody unworthy of you, and if it isn't disease——" He answered the question in her eyes with a little impatient gesture of dissent—"then, Adrian, I've lived longer than you, dear, and I know it's only good to marry for love, man or woman. If you love her and she loves you, let other things go. I am sure that I am right."

He was surprised that she should counsel him so, surprised at the almost imploring eagerness of her tone. She knew, as well as he, that he had a duty to his house. But all women were the same when it was a question of love, every practical consideration went to the wind. It did not matter—the little confidence had eased his pain for the minute, he had so ached for a gentle presence, a soothing word.

"You mustn't worry about me, mother. It isn't fair to tell you half of it, because you can't judge of it so. But it has done me good to talk to you, and now you must go to bed at once. I'm a selfish brute to keep you up at all." He kissed her gently and was gone. But when he left her, she sat looking out a long while into the darkness of the garden, her face haggard and drawn with pain. Were ghosts never laid?

Adrian himself went into the library, and found his father working out a chess problem. He had hoped he too might have gone to bed, but it would be discourtesy not to go in now, and Adrian was never discourteous.

Mr Harding was a tall, powerfully built man, still upright, for all his sixty years. In face he bore a resemblance to Gladstone, so strong that the most casual observer could not have failed to notice it, one

of those freaks of nature devised for our lasting perplexity.

"You wrote that, as soon as I got back, you had something to say to me, Adrian," he said presently, as he was mixing himself the fairly stiff whisky and soda he permitted himself for nightcap. "Let us have it."

"I find I need not trouble you with it now, sir," said Adrian. "The circumstances have altered completely."

"Why so pale and wan, fond lover, eh?" chuckled his father, hazarding the "*Cherchez la femme*" which a man of the world learns to think of as a safe guess.

"She'll get over it, Adrian, she'll get over it. Your mother refused me four times—confound it! They all do it—think it makes us more ardent, you know. Seriously, my boy, I'm very glad you think of settling down. I was getting anxious. I'm not a chicken, and I want to hear my grandson's feet pattering about this old place before I send in my papers."

"I hoped to tell you, father, about the lady I asked to be my wife. But as things are——"

He had better speak of it and have done with it. It would only mean raking up the subject some other time, and it would be better to bury it from this night, and have it forgotten. He proceeded to tell his father in as few words as possible the facts of the case.

"Good God, Adrian, you can't hesitate!" the old man exclaimed. "Do you know what it means? The possibility of half-caste children succeeding here, the possibility of your son being the first heir to the estate, who isn't pure bred, and worse, looks as if he weren't! You can't do it—you must give her up. It isn't as if you were Smith or Jones or Robinson, you know, we Hardings have got to think of our race. We come of a

damned fine stock, and we mustn't cross the breed. If it comes to that, I may tell you I wasn't in love with your mother when I married her. I chose her for her birth and breeding, because I thought she'd make a good mother of Hardings. And you must do the same. I'm sorry for you—very—it is rough luck, but your ancestors have done a lot for you, and it is your turn now. If it had been anything else! But it's bound to come out—'what's bred in the bone,' they say. You say Miss Lathom looks English, but that's all the more reason why the second generation should revert to the native strain—I know from my foals. You must keep a stiff upper lip, my boy, and forget it. You remember when you were a little chap I taught you to end up your prayers: 'And thank God I was born a Harding.' It used to make your mother very angry, but at least it helped you to realise what you owe them, those ancestors of yours."

"For that matter, sir," said Adrian, "I still thank God I was born a Harding, and I suppose there is nothing to be done—I don't think we need speak of it again."

"Certainly not, Adrian. Certainly not."

And Mr Harding went off to bed with the very diffident "Good-night" of the father who finds himself for once on intimate terms with his own son.

When he had gone Adrian sat down to the most difficult task of his thirty-four years—a letter to Hasil to tell her that the Hardings did not consider her worthy to be made one of them. Those pictures hanging round the walls in solemn dignity had sat in judgment, and had sentenced.

It was not until he had finished his letter that he

remembered that the living Hardings had been no less rigorous. Of the three who had spoken of her, his mother had made the only allusion as to what it might all mean to Hasil. "You must think of her," she had said. He felt as if he had killed a little child.

But, twenty-five miles off, Hasil was sleeping dreamlessly, smiling as she slept, with one hand under her pillow, tightly clasping Harding's birthday letter.

CHAPTER XV

THAT morning, for the first time, there had been no letter from Adrian. What could be the meaning of it? Was he ill? Had there been an accident? Should she wire? Hasil passed the morning in a fever of unrest, imagining all the disasters which so readily occur to one's mind as possibilities, nay, probabilities, when one is twenty-one and in love.

There was no other delivery that day, but letters did arrive again at the post office at half-past two, and were handed over the counter if you applied for them in person. She was there long before they were due, and had to stifle her impatience under a show of interest while the old postmistress discoursed on the peccadilloes of her fowls.

At last! Yes; there was her letter, unmistakably square and fat and neat. With a great relief at her heart, she took it, and stepped out into the glare of the August sun. It would not do to be seen reading it along the road, and she could not wait till she got to Castle Holme—it was nearly half-an-hour's walk. She turned aside into a field, where the newly reaped barley stood in goodly "stooks," each like a Jove-shower for a waiting Danaë. Under the shadow of a big elm she flung herself down and, hands propping face, began to read :

"MY DEAREST HASIL,—I have a very, very difficult

thing to do—the hardest thing I have ever done. I don't know how to write it, but it must be written. . . .”

She caught her breath, and, bracing herself instinctively to meet whatever blow might be in store for her, read the letter steadily through. . . .

She lay there a long, long time without moving. The sun was not nearly so hot now—great masses of grey cloud were hiding him, and the air was thunderous, oppressive. The clumps of centaury in the hedge feared it was going to rain, and shut up their petals so tight that they looked like branching candelabra, with the tiniest little pink candles. The great cows in the next field, tawny and coal-black, white and pale brown, had passed out, heavy-uddered, some time before to the milking. She had noticed them, had thought vaguely of a line from somewhere: “Sweet was”—was what?—“as the breath of the kine in the meadows.” They tantalised her, those two missing words, and she could not remember who wrote them—but that was some time before. She had lain without moving for so long now that the youngest bunny of a large family was nearly sure that his mother was wrong, and that it *wasn't* alive. It looked as if there should be good burrows in it. He was just cultivating a “told-you-so” expression for his mother's benefit, when it moved slightly, and he scuttled back to his family in terror.

Hasil shivered, and then sat up. Was it to-day or yesterday or to-morrow? She felt as if she had fallen and hurt herself somewhere; her head was so light, and her limbs like lead. She would be late for tea if she did not hurry. She walked quickly, and her footsteps

on the highroad accompanied the song in her brain :
“ It’s all over and done with—quite over and done with.”

She tried to think connectedly. Adrian was not going to marry her because her mother had been a native. But that was absurd—because her father had said that her mother’s presence brought blessing and peace always, and her father had been an English gentleman. Adrian had said something else about “ our children ”; it had hurt more cruelly than anything—those hours ago when she could feel pain. She, Hasil, was the child of a native, and yet looked like other English girls, but her children and Adrian’s—she could go no further, her brain refused to act at her volition. Perhaps it was a dream. She had dreamed the other night that Adrian was drowned, but in her grief, something in her had known that by a supreme effort she could wake and free herself, and she had done so. This was no dream.

Tea was waiting on the lawn, and Uncle James was preparing welcome tempered with reproof, when she cut him short.

“ I think there must be thunder about, Aunt Selina—I’ve got such a bad headache. If you don’t mind, I’ll go and lie down a bit—I don’t want any tea.”

She tried to hurry away from the offers of eau-de-Cologne and lavender water, or of handkerchiefs soaked in vinegar—but it seemed ages till she was safely locked in her room. Pressing her hands tightly against her burning eyes, she tried once more—she *must* get this matter straight. Adrian came of a good old English family, and English people who thought of their families did not marry natives, or the children of natives, in

case it might "come out" in their children. But what if it did? Who would be harmed by it? What could it matter?

Suddenly she remembered Mason's "Open Road" and the moral it pointed, though she could never have told why she thought of it: *East is East and West is West*. That was how it mattered. She had never thought, somehow, of there being that barrier between her father and mother. He had lived so long in India, and she knew so little about it all. Besides, her mother's presence brought blessing and peace always. But that was in India—her own land—here was she, Hasil, in England, where there were people to tell you it was a dreadful thing, where the man who said he loved you could not marry you because of the disgrace it would bring upon his family. She carried a taint in her blood as terrible as that of cancer or consumption.

And Adrian, who had held at the debate at the Union that the morality of the individual might have to be sacrificed to the good of the many, had offered up his honour, his plighted word, her happiness, and that sacred thing, their love, on the altar of the god Family-Name.

But what a *damnable* world in which God allowed such things to happen! She thought of that graceful, beautiful mother of hers, of the father who had been so long her dearest memory—often the most real thing in her life. They had bequeathed her nothing but disgrace and sorrow. . . .

Then came, faint as a gleam of sunshine through lowering clouds, the deep thankfulness that there need be no explanations. To all intents and purposes,

nothing would have happened. There need be no lying to her uncle and aunt, nor to Claudia. Mrs Granville must be told, but she could be trusted; for the rest, life would go on just the same.

The same? She nearly broke down then, but something still remained to be done. She wrote on a half-sheet of notepaper :

“ Of course I quite understand. It was stupid of me not to have realised. Please explain to Mrs Granville.

“ H. L.”

Then, wrapping it round the little box which contained the opal ring, she packed it up and addressed it mechanically to Adrian Harding, Esq., The Old Hall, Brambleton, Surrey.

The song in her brain began again remorselessly : “ It’s all over and done with—quite over and done with.” She turned off the light, undressed in the dark, and flung herself on her bed, to toss, dry-eyed, till day-break. The ash-tree whispered the song to her brain, and her brain flung it back to the ash-tree, while the thunderstorm the centaury had feared broke over the country. . . .

She seemed herself again next morning, except that she was very pale. Aunt Selina put it down to nervous excitement, and suggested a tonic. Otherwise nothing was different. For a lifetime of days she got up and dressed and ate her meals and worked and went out and went to bed, hardly knowing where one day ended and another began. Then about ten days later came a letter from Clement Dale. She opened it, read it, and

laughed as if she would never stop. It was very short, very like him. It told her that he had been preferred to the living of Graydales, a little village on the coast of Cumberland, which was in his stepfather's gift. He had loved her since that April at Mallacombe, and now, unworthy though he felt, he was actually in a position to ask her to marry him.

She left the house, feeling that she must have air and space for the problem before her. It was a hot summer morning—the cattle were lying already under the elm-trees in the meadows, and the air was rippling visibly before her, as if she were looking through water. The fragrance of the honeysuckle was poignantly sweet, but the beauty of its flower was passing. A dog ran past her with tongue lolling wearily, and ahead of her she noticed the bent figure of an old man, long past work, limping along the road in the wake of a motor car that had just blinded him with dust.

How was it that into the triumph and glory of the summer there had crept something ruthless, something cruel? It was no longer the ripening of a beautiful and natural passion—it seemed the insatiable fierceness of lust. She felt languid and oppressed. Turning off the path, she entered the woods; here, at any rate, would be shelter and shade. A little brook sang light-heartedly in a runnel beside the way, bringing the thought of coolness. Presently the grass track became almost lost in tangled undergrowth, through which she could hardly penetrate, then suddenly opened out into a green spaciousness, and she sank down, with a flooding sense of sanctuary.

She and Miss Royston had named this place in her childish days "the Cathedral." There was a grand

central aisle, arched overhead with interlacing trees, whose massive trunks were the pillars of the building. To north and south, for windows, the sky broke through the green leaf-tracery, and east, where the altar should be, showed the faint outline of the downs, hazy in the heat, as if God Himself might be dwelling for a time in that Sanctum Sanctorum. . . .

What was she to do? Clement Dale was offering her the greatest gift a good man could offer a woman, and she felt intuitively that the knowledge which had mattered so greatly to Adrian would have no deterrent effect on this man. He would divide people into two camps—those who were for Christ, and those who were against Him. And marriage with him would assuage that blinding, burning pain that at times seemed to be racking her very limbs. Deeply as she loved Adrian, the most vivid thing in her misery had come to be this intolerable sense of shame. She had the Oriental pride that an Englishman scarcely understands. It was to her as if Adrian had used her for his pleasure, and then flung her aside, a slave girl in truth, and not a queen. Every fibre of her being quivered with the outrage done to her. She did not love Clement, but she was fond of him, and perhaps some warmer feeling would come. He was good, upright, simple-hearted—there was so much to admire in him.

But whatever Adrian might be, or not be, her heart had called out to him across all the barriers of caste. She had known him for her mate for all time, she had understood something of the wonderful future for them both in union and fulfilment.

Her thinking stung her numbed senses into a fresh realisation of her loss. Some wild thing in her seemed

to stir, and every feeling in her was concentrated into a passionate longing for Adrian that was greater than herself, and against which she stood powerless. She hungered for the touch of his hand, for the smell of his pipe, for the "feel" of his rough coat, for the sound of his voice, with that dear huskiness in it when he was moved. . . .

The silent weeping that had its way with her was no outlet for her grief, nothing but a voiceless resentment against the suffering that had so unthinkably become hers. Quite soon she drove the tears back and forced herself to review the situation. Fate had checkmated her once, but the next move was in her hands. She tried to think of those characteristics of Clement Dale's that had irritated her at Mallacombe, but there seemed nothing deserving her criticism. Things they had laughed at, things they had teased him for, nothing serious.

"Good heavens!" she thought bitterly, "who am I to criticise? Don't you think, Hasil Lathom, you had better be thankful for whatever good the gods provide you?" But with the bitterness, her sorrow surged back and found utterance.

"Oh, father—oh, Dadlums—how *could* you—how *could* you?"

There was a rustling through the bushes and briers—something was coming. Too big, by the sound of it, for anything but a cow, and cows do not stray through the depths of a wood as a rule. She sat up, pushed her fingers through her hair to reduce its disorder, and bent down, so as to hide her face, over a foxglove, one of summer's latest guests, with only two bells left hanging from its tapering spire.

The intruder revealed himself as "Dotty Dick"—a type familiar in almost every village in England. But he was differentiated from the ordinary village idiot by a wonderful sensitiveness of feature, an absence of deformity, and an extensive knowledge of country lore, some of it mythological. His face was really beautiful, and had always seemed to Hasil singularly like that of the Christ, as the great masters pictured Him,—the same patient lines about the mouth, the same sweetness in the eyes.

"Wunnerful things foaksgloves be, missie," he said now. "Fancy a flower having the sense to show Mr Bee the way in by them little rings of colour—like coastguard-stones along the cliff. Come to think of it, flowers and suchlike are a long sight sensibler nor what humans are. Larks don't carry no lumping great watches, for instance. They *knows* when it's the half-hour, and when you see 'em fly up from the ground into the blue, they're striking it, in a manner of speaking. Conies, likewise, don't need to call out and holler when they find danger. The old gaffers stamp with their back legs, and the young 'uns hear them ever so far off, and keep out o' the way. I backs creeturs agin humans any day."

"I think I'm beginning to agree with you, Dick," said Hasil. "By the way, I wonder why foxgloves are called foxgloves? Do you know?"

"Well, missie, there's them as says they're the gloves of a fox, but I don't hold with that at all myself. What would a fox be wanting with gloves?"

Dick bent down as he spoke, and gathered a handful of the pine-cones that strewed the ground ("For my fire in the winter-time," he explained).

"No, missie, I'm thinking it means Foaks' gloves; the gloves of the Little Foaks."

"What do you mean, Dick?" Hasil asked. "They're too tiny ever to have been thought like people's gloves—or children's even."

She could have ended the conversation in a minute by the slightest suggestion of a snub, but that would have been to hurt Dick unforgettably. Besides, in her unhappiness, it was somehow a relief to talk to him.

"The Little Foaks is the fairishes, missie—they as lives way up on the Downs yonder—right up by Chanctonbury Ring. My grandfather used to say 'e's seen 'em in the moonlight dancing on their grass-rings time and again, when 'e came back late from courting."

"Why should they want gloves, though, do you suppose?"

"Gardening gloves, missie, I should say," Dick answered, with a face of utter seriousness, "for looking after gorse-bushes and such. Why, in March, when 'twas close time, I wanted a pheasant for my supper, and them plaguy barbed wires kept me out past all belief. And I stood right there and says: 'Don't you think, Little Foaks, you could see after this job for me?' And sure enough, I goes next morning and somebody's untwisted that wire, and 'tis all plain sailing. Fairishes' work, missie; of course 'twas, and work you'd be wanting gloves for."

"How long since barbed wire kept you out of things, Dick?" Hasil put in mischievously.

"Now, missie, don't you go spoiling a poor man's gettings," Dick grinned deprecatingly. "When I comes to climaxes in my life, I always consult the Book

—'tis a custom my mother taught me. Well, I shuts my eyes, and puts my finger in anyhow, and it came 'Man shall not live by bread alone.' Nothing could be plainer than that, I says, and goes for my lord pheasant."

"Dick, Dick!" laughed Hasil, "I don't believe Aunt Selina would approve of your doing that sort of thing."

"Ah, missie, she's a good lady with a white heart, but there's a sight she don't know. In the spring, when Gammer Burton's grandchild had whooping cough, I telled your aunt it could be cured with the hair of a dog's neck buried atwixt bread and butter at four ways. If she'd 'a' done as I said, 'tis sure and certain the little maid ud 'ave been alive to-day. But ' 'Tis heathenish practices, Dick,' says she, and there an end."

Hasil got up, shook the pine-needles from her lap, and held out her hand.

"It's very hard to know what is nonsense and what is sense sometimes," she said. "Good-bye, Dick—they'll be wondering what's become of me at Castle Holme."

Alone in her room that night Hasil set herself for the last time to the task in front of her. She would decide before she slept. She pictured her life ahead if she refused to marry Clement. The "gusto" and enthusiasm which had distinguished her work, and been its most valuable characteristic, seemed to have died out as utterly as a lantern-light expires in the wind. It did not seem to her that she possessed any longer either sufficient energy or sufficient desire for independence: the idea was tasteless, not to be thought of. There remained existence with her aunt and uncle at

sleepy old Castle Holme, where one forgot the date, the very day of the week. . . . But with Clement she would be protected and cherished, her life would be peaceful, perhaps useful. She could at least respect the things that Clement held dear, and she wanted to be good, like Clement. It would be a garden of white lilac and lilies of the valley, and the other garden had been red roses in the moonlight, and the songs of nightingales. In that garden of white flowers that her life with Clement might be, her wounded pride would be healed, and peace was better than passion, with the inevitable suffering that passion brings. The gate stood open, she had but to enter within it. Everything conspired towards her accepting him for her husband, and she felt that she could not struggle against circumstances any longer.

She rose hastily, and opened her writing-desk, meaning to let him know at once of her decision, but paused, pen in hand. What had Dick told her that morning of his method in "climaxes"? He had consulted the Book, he said. Well, so would she.

She went to the window, where she had been kneeling so long with her arms on the windowsill, and looked out into the night. The jessamine wreathed and twined its sprays just below her, breathing its delicate, unreal perfume. Memory stabbed her with the thought of that birthday night, so short a time ago, when she had written to Adrian from the depths of her. Turning away, she took her Bible from the shelf by her bed, and plunged her forefinger among the leaves at random. "*Thy people shall be my people,*" she read in the dim light, "*and thy God my God.*"

The lines about her mouth grew hard, and her eyes

took on the fixed, but curiously expressionless look her father had seen many a time in the faces of men before him for judgment.

“That just about settles it,” she said, and took up her pen.

CHAPTER XVI

ADRIAN HARDING, meanwhile, was as satisfied with himself and life generally as the majority of men are whose choice favours the future at the expense of the present. (They are apt to torment us unduly, the ghosts of those gloriously unwise things from which we refrained; it hardly seems a fair reward for our foresight and logical prudence. And yet—and yet—has anything since ever tasted as sweet as the apples of that orchard in which we thought it wrong to trespass, or the lips of that girl we should have been so foolish to kiss? Let us think of the credit balance at our bank, for heaven's sake, and shut out the vision !)

Adrian had the sort of conscience which cannot be hoodwinked, together with sufficient of the artist's temperament to prefer seeing himself in picturesque situations as often as possible. The two combined to make his nights a mockery. He knew that all his father had said was sound, but he knew, too, that if that were all, Hasil would still be engaged to him. It was he, Adrian, who was soaked through and through in pride of race—who could not bear, for his own sake, the prospect of children who might betray their mother's birth-stain. Tossing awake through the hot August night, he came to know Adrian Harding a little better. He knew, for instance, that it would break his father's heart if he had wanted to marry a Roman Catholic. For his father, the King of England, the Tory Govern-

ment and the Protestant religion constituted the backbone of the world. But for him one Church was as good as another, and such a difference in the lady of his choice might be regrettable (he had a sort of vague idea that the very nicest sort of woman would belong necessarily to the Church of England), but not fatal. Even if his father cut him off with the proverbial shilling, he would be none the less a Harding; the estate must come to him in any case, and meantime there was plenty of work for him to do.

The conviction struck home to him that for all his father's scruples, he would have married that Roman Catholic lady.

Women had not hitherto interfered to any great extent with the even tenor of his way. He had been faced at adolescence with the problem common to most men in the perilous years before marriage, and had made an attempt to face it squarely. Seemingly there was a live beast at the heart of a man—then it was clearly Adrian Harding's business to keep that beast chained. Wherefore he went in for many forms of violent "ekker" at Oxford, and took most of his pleasures very sadly indeed. As an undergraduate his circle knew him as "the wise youth," by reason of a certain irony of utterance and a turn for aphorisms—his Christian name, too, no doubt irresistibly suggested the likeness.

And occasionally the beast would slip its chain and work red ruin. . . . "Old Harding reminds me of a forest of blue gum," said a Rhodes scholar from New South Wales once. "It's the driest thing you've ever seen—and just you watch it blazing. . . ." The poetic instinct that was in him made it impossible for him to

take such satisfaction as came easily to hand, and dismiss the matter as an episode—the beast was something of an epicure. At one time there had been a dancer about whom all London had raved. . . . She seemed to him to embody the grace of a flower swaying in the wind, of the great wave-born goddess, of a Chopin nocturne. She liked him too, and for a time he very nearly forgot to thank God he was born a Harding. But she had had the good sense to forget him, and he had heard the call of Alma Mater and gone back to his old college—to lecture and to help his quondam tutor by taking over some of his pupils.

The grave sweet charm of Oxford laid hold of him. She satisfied him completely as the love of a very wise elder sister might, and he was very happy among the circle of cultured men he was proud to call his friends. But for his music he would have rapidly become middle-aged. Already he had precise, old-fashioned ways; it annoyed him to see untidiness—he called it “discord.” And then Hasil came into his life that Sunday afternoon at the Granvilles’, and man and beast together shouted: “It is SHE!”

She was so pure, so young, yet so—— Seeking about in his mind for a word he could only find “vivid.” She might make anything of a man, and she had given all her love to him as frankly and innocently as any child. Could he bear to lose her even now? He had dwelt so often on the days in store for them both; how he would take her to Pompeii and Athens and Corinth, and watch her great eyes grow dark with feeling—how she would read to him from the poetry she loved—God! how she would smile at him over their son’s downy head

(for of course it would be a son) and remind him of Laurence Hope's song that first time they met. . . .

Morning after morning the grey dawn tiptoed into his room to find him sitting at his writing-table with haggard eyes, and head between his hands—or tracing idle figures on his blotting paper, and ready, like the fool of the Psalms, to curse God and die. His mother, noticing untasted breakfasts and a tendency to irritability in a son who never indulged in it, summoned up sufficient courage to speak to him. She was embroidering some dainty thing, all soft flannel and white silk, and he lay on the grass at her feet, thinking idly what beautiful hands she had. Long slender hands, of which an old Italian might have dreamed, and striven to portray for his Madonna. He thought suddenly of his father's—short and powerful, with square, finely kept nails, and rather hairy, and was conscious of a swift strange feeling of revulsion.

“What's that thing you're doing, mother?” he said at last. “A blouse or a teacloth, or a scarf for me?”

She laughed gently. “You'd never guess, I'm afraid, Adrian. It's a petticoat, dear, for a tiny baby.”

“And which of all your thriftless pensioners is it this time?” he said, with a grimace. “When will Giles Hodge discover that it is extravagant to have babies, and totally opposed to existing economic conditions?”

“It's the gardener's wife, poor thing,” his mother answered, buttonholing tiny scalloped edges. “The tenth. . . . But you see, Adrian, we must have citizens, and since other people shirk their responsibilities, the burden falls on the class Giles Hodge typifies.”

"You mean that a man like me has no business to be a bachelor at thirty-four?" Adrian asked. "But what are we poor devils to do if we can't get anybody to have us?"

"But the girl you showed me, dear. I know she loves you. Are you so sure that it is impossible? If you knew how I longed to see you settled, Adrian! I'd give anything in the wide world to be making this for a baby of yours!"

"Mother, don't you remember the other night I told you it couldn't ever come off? She—her—well, her mother was a native woman. Her father married her in some God-forsaken Indian station. I only knew last week; so you see, it's no good thinking of it, and I sha'n't be wanting petticoats yet." He tried to smile, but it was a pitiable attempt.

The latest kitten was playing wantonly with his mother's silk reel, and it was a minute or two before she spoke.

"Adrian, dear," she said at length, "does that make it quite impossible?"

"Yes, mother, it does," he answered, "in father's eyes and mine. I think, somehow, women have a different way of looking at these things. They care for the individual, men care for the family. It might—perhaps you don't understand—it might make our children different, and I have a duty to the name."

She smiled a little at his thought that she might not understand, but he noticed, with a curious pang at his heart, that there were grey shadows round her mouth, and her delicate nostrils seemed thinner and pinched-looking.

"You're looking rotten lately, dear," he said to her.

"Have you been overdoing it?—and why don't you go away for a change, or see a doctor or something?"

"Don't worry about me, my son. I haven't been overdoing it, and I'm not going away, but I have seen a doctor. It sounds rather like a French exercise, doesn't it?"

"Well, and what did the fellow say?"

"He diagnosed my disease as old age, Adrian, and past praying for."

"Mother, what on earth do you mean? Why, you can't be more than fifty-three or four—I don't believe you're as much—that's when a good many people begin to find life worth living."

"My dear boy, years haven't anything to do with it. Some of us wear out and some of us rust out—and I believe I'm the sort that wears out. Now don't let's be tragic, for Azrael isn't so very near yet, and if he were, I should be glad for more reasons than I should be sorry. Meanwhile, *ego moritura te saluto*, and you must listen to a little homily for once. I haven't bothered you with preaching, have I, Adrian?"

He rose to his feet, and put his hands on her shoulders, looking down at her, piercing her with those questioning grey eyes.

"What do you want to say to me, mother?"

"Just this, son of mine; you and I are the kind of people who should marry for love—yes, you are, Adrian, I know it. You talk about the name, but what is a name beside real things like hearts and lives and children?"

"Why, mother, a name *is* hearts and lives and children, not an empty thing, a shadow. Don't you see it like that?"

"No, Adrian, I don't," she answered, with a hard little laugh. "To me it's more like a sort of Juggernaut car. Oh, Adrian, take your happiness while you can—the gods don't give twice."

She gathered up her sewing, and went slowly towards the house. The long shadows were falling slantwise over the grass—the lord peacock had already mounted aloft and was shrilly scolding his sultanas for their dallying gossip below stairs. Adrian stood looking after that slight, graceful figure with its languid, trailing draperies, then followed it and caught his mother up at the top of the wide shallow steps leading on to the terrace.

"Did *you* marry for love, mother?" he asked simply.

"If I had, should I know how much it matters to you and me?" was her quiet answer. And she went on into the house, while again he noticed, with that same stab of feeling, that she walked as if she were very tired. She had looked him straight in the eyes as she answered, and he had felt for a moment as if much more lay behind those quiet words, things that her eyes wanted to say for her but could not, because her spirit willed they should not. She had always seemed happy, with her books and her flowers and himself. Ever since he left school he had known that she and his father had very little in common, but with the careless optimism of youth for itself and for others he had supposed that they understood each other, and that it was all right. Poor little mother!

His father, too, was concerned at the way the boy seemed to take this affair to heart, and in his own way showed it. They were looking at the brood-mares, the

finest of their kind in England, and Mr Harding's pet hobby.

"My old ladies have never failed me," he would say. "They're the only women I *can* trust. . . . Look at this one, my boy," he was saying now, passing his hand over the quarters of a particularly finely made mare. "She's the mother of I don't know how many heroes already, and I bet you anything you like her last is a Derby winner. I sold the pick of them all for three thousand at Doncaster—as fine a little colt as ever stood! What's his name, confound it!—by Fond-Lover, out of Look-before-you-leap. Do you remember it, Adrian, by any chance? It's slipped my memory."

"What did you say, sir?" said Adrian absently. His thoughts had been very far away from mares and their offspring. "By Fond-Lover, out of Look-before-you-leap? Oh, Damned-Fool, I should think!"

He could have bitten his tongue out the next minute, but the bitterness that was in him could not always be controlled.

His father said nothing—he was not one of the finest judges of horseflesh in England without having incidentally learnt a little about men too. "I can judge a horse, and I can judge a man," was another of his favourite sayings, "but give me a woman and you have me."

So as they were going back to lunch, having inspected the Berkshire pigs, and chatted with the women working on the fields, he said casually :

"Why don't you invite Charlie Roberts down for a bit, Adrian? I'm getting so deuced stiff in the joints, I'm no companion for you nowadays."

"Oh, thanks, dad," Adrian replied; "it's very decent of you to think of it, but if I do anything, I shall go away somewhere, I think—I've got a good deal of work to get in some time, and it's too jolly here to be exactly conducive to that sort of thing."

He had an absurd desire to go to Mallacombe. Hasil had written her first real letter to him from there, and he felt as if there he might have peace from the images which tortured him day and night. The beast was revenging itself for its curbing and bridling in the past; he had forgotten it in the fulness of his love for Hasil, and now it was like to rend him.

Down there the sea and the hills might help to exorcise it. It wouldn't be such a bad idea to get Charlie Roberts to come along. He was a red-haired, freckled, untroubled person, with a breezy philosophy of his own. . . .

A few days later saw them settled at the little inn, rejoicing in the cognomen of "The Tippling Pedagogue"—and in truth it gazes calmly out over the sunny sheltered bay, as if itself in that blissful state of drowsy inebriety when learning is of no account. Their sitting-room overlooked the sea and perched right over it, so that in winter the waves washed the very windows at which they were now sitting. Adrian, watching the magnificent sunset, wondered what this place had said to Hasil. How the wonderful colouring must have appealed to her, whose soul cried out for colour always!—how eagerly she must have responded to the beauty of it all! He turned from the window to meet the placid gaze of Charlie Roberts. . . .

"I say, Harding, will you shed the light of your academic learning on the epic I am listening to on the

beach down there? There's a soul in torment, and——
Listen! He's just beginning the tenth verse."

"Tha white cat kicked at the black cat's eye,
Zed the owld man: 'Youer 'orse will die.'
'If a dies, I'll tan his skin,
But if a lives, I'll ride him agin.'
Ho! Ju-dee-i-o!
Sing Ju-dee-i-o!"

They listened in silence while the mournful croon died away, and the singer shuffled over the pebbles.

"Can't you make some smugglers' rune out of that? It would be child's play after your scholarly treatise on 'See-saw, Margery Daw.'"

Adrian reddened. His sense of humour was not his strong point, and in his undergraduate days he had been somehow beguiled into writing a lengthy and serious article in the college "Mag," setting forth his theory that the aforesaid nursery rhyme was a lampoon relating to Dryden's transference of loyalty from the Protector to Charles II. and his subsequent appointment on a small salary as poet to the new king.

Charlie saw that he was treading on dangerous ground, and added: "Seriously, I shouldn't be surprised if it had something to do with smuggling or wrecking. Old Jan Edgecombe told me to-day that his mother taught him to say these four lines among his prayers of an evening:

"Blau, win'!
Rise, zay!
Ship ashore!
Avore day!

"What do you think of that, my friend, for the mother of a Christian sailorman?"

But Adrian was not to be pacified, and there was silence, until the irrepressible Charlie began again, with a rather sheepish grin :

“ I say, old chap, I didn’t tell you I’m engaged, did I? ”

“ No ; you didn’t. Best congrattars, Charlie. Who is she and when’s the happy day? ”

But he groaned inwardly. Good Lord ! had he brought Charlie away with him to this place to listen to the bleatings of calf-love?

“ Oh, she’s simply splendid. Rippingest little girl in the world—shoots straight, rides to hounds, plays golf, does every blessed thing. A regular little sport, every inch.”

“ What should you go for, Charlie, in choosing a wife? ” queried Adrian, puffing slowly away at his pipe, and watching the moon-path on the waves.

“ Doesn’t matter much about the face,” answered Charlie promptly. “ Must be sound of wind and limb, and straight all through ; no humbug or fake or anything of that sort. Once you’ve got that, one girl’s pretty near as good as another.”

“ Is she, though? Expound, O wise young judge.”

It was Charlie’s turn to redden now. “ Well, I’ve no sort of use myself for the kind of woman one—er—doesn’t mean to marry ; don’t understand that sort of thing at all. At the same time, I’ve got to marry some time and settle down decently, so, as I was getting on for thirty, I looked round and chose the nicest girl I knew, and thank heaven her views coincided with mine ! That’s all.”

“ That’s all, is it? ” echoed Adrian drily. “ But suppose you aren’t lucky enough to get engaged to the best

girl you know and 'settle down'—and yet you feel you must marry?"

"Can't say, I'm sure," Charlie said. "Bad luck, of course; but one mustn't make a beast of oneself even then."

He threw his cigarette end out of the window, and they saw it gleaming like a tiny Polyphemus-eye on the beach below.

"This air does make one sleepy, Harding. I think I'm going to bed."

"If you do, you'll miss Tryphena bringing in drinks, and she's a sight for the gods—black hair and Devonshire blue eyes and the sauciest smile in the world."

"What a rum chap you are!" commented Charlie, candle in hand. "I should have thought you were the last fellow in the world to care about the black hair and blue eyes of an innkeeper's daughter. . . . Well, so long!"

But Adrian's dreams were haunted by a mocking shape who had Hasil's voice, but Tryphena's eyes and hair. And she lured him over stony roads all night long to a cliff edge, and he was powerless to resist, though he knew the sheer destruction that awaited him if he followed the beckoning of those slender white arms.

CHAPTER XVII

As Hasil had expected, the fact of her parentage could make no difference to Clement Dale's love for her.

"We are all God's children, my dearest," he wrote, "and that is all that can matter to either of us. For my part, I don't know how to thank Him for giving you to me—my thanksgiving shall be the life you and I will lead in His service."

Hasil, with the strange sensation that she was being driven she knew not whither, found Aunt Selina in the storeroom among her jellies and jams, and told her. And Aunt Selina went to Uncle James and told him, and there was much kissing and congratulation from the one, and weighty exhortation from the other.

"My dear little Hasil," said Aunt Selina, very moist as to the eyes, and very shaky as to the voice, "to think of your being old enough to be married! And it seems just the other day your Uncle James brought you down here, so pale and tired-looking—and my heart went out to you from the very first!"

"She is young, my dear," said Uncle James, "but I trust not too young to remember that marriage is a solemn covenant, and that she must not allow herself to drift into it through any foolish love of admiration, nor to believe too readily a young man's protestations of affection."

"I am sure she has thought the matter over very carefully, James," put in Aunt Selina, anxious to fill

the gap rather conspicuously left by Hasil's silence. "I am not altogether surprised at the news. You have been thinking of it ever since you came home in June, have you not, dear?"

"Yes, aunt; yes, of course." Hasil went to the window and drew the middle blind up a little higher, so that the level of all three was the same.

"Ah, well! ladies notice these things," said Uncle James briskly. Time was getting on, and he had to see Gibson about a little matter connected with the herb bed. "You say he is a clergyman of the Church of England? That is satisfactory, very satisfactory indeed—when taken in connection with the fact that he has sufficient to support a wife. I do not suppose for a moment that his income will give you the luxuries you have been accustomed to, my dear, but I am no believer in the creed that young people should begin where their elders leave off. And if you are both economical and industrious, there is no reason why you shouldn't be very comfortably off one day, even if you should be blest with a—ahem!—family."

Hasil answered, "No, Uncle James," and wondered whether all girls were similarly speechless on occasions such as this, or whether her own situation was to blame for making her feel so apathetic. If she had been telling them that Adrian Harding had asked her to be his wife, would she have been standing there lifelessly, plaiting the blindcord into impossible knots?

She was recalled with a start from her thoughts by Uncle James' proposal that he should write that day to Clement Dale, inviting him to Castle Holme for a week, that they might see for themselves what he was like, and "have a business talk" together. She stifled

her first impulse to cry : " No, no, no ! Not yet ! " They would think it so strange, and they must never think anything strange. If she were not questioned too much, if people took the things she said and did for granted, then life could be " got through " somehow—not otherwise. And since she could not prevent people commenting on what seemed to them unusual or abnormal, she must see to it that they had no such food for speculation.

" I think that would be very nice indeed, Uncle James," she said quietly. " I was wondering if he could get away or not, but I think so—he isn't due at Greydales till October. He wants so much to know you both, and I do hope you will like him."

" Very well, my dear ; then the letter shall go by the eleven o'clock post." And when they were alone that night he told his wife how agreeably surprised he had been by Hasil's bearing at this crisis of her life.

" I must confess it makes me think very highly of a University training for young women, Selina," he concluded. " The child was always so excitable and highly strung. I expected tears and hysterics and no end of highfalutin nonsense, but she behaved exactly as I should have wished a niece of mine to conduct herself, and I should think she would make this Mr Dale very happy."

Selina, listening to her spouse's regular breathing, was conscious of a vague feeling of disappointment. Romance had never touched her life. James Blackford Smith had sedately approached her with an offer of marriage the first time he had found her alone, and she had thankfully embraced her sole opportunity of

escaping that destiny which of all others seemed most terrible to her—an old maid's.

But Hasil was different—made of quite other stuff—beautiful, highly coloured things might happen to Hasil, as they did to Ouida's heroines or Miss Braddon's. She had known something had occurred to change and develop the child, and she had rejoiced. She was to know something of that wonderful rose-tinted world of love after all, even if the experience were to be vicarious. . . . And now that it was absolutely upon her, she had to confess that it was very flat. It was not that Mr Dale was a clergyman; on the whole, that fact was decidedly in his favour, as was his Christian name. It was in Hasil herself that the lack had been; the heroine had failed to do herself justice. Where were the shining eyes, the flushed cheeks, the tremulous accents she had been led to expect? She herself had supplied all the emotion, Hasil had been perfectly calm and sedate. Yet the child had not been like that at the beginning of the holidays, surely, when her own suspicions had been first aroused? Or was she (at her time of life, too!) so terribly sentimental that she credited her niece with feelings in which she was much too sensible ever to indulge? After all, University women were different, and Hasil openly scoffed at Ouida, and was not over-respectful to Miss Braddon and Marie Corelli. She sighed gently, and set herself to the deliberate counting of sheep going over a gap in the hedge.

When the gentleman himself arrived in the course of a few days, her spirits rose. Here were the blue eyes, the clear-cut features, the dark hair of the true hero of three-volume romance! Clement Dale was

installed for ever in the little old lady's heart by virtue of his profile. But Mr Blackford Smith quite approved of him too. "Except for his absurd name, my dear, he seems to me to be an excellent young man," was his verdict to Hasil, "with plenty of mental and moral balance and good sense generally."

Which was very high praise indeed.

Hasil herself was painfully shy for the first part of Clement's visit. She had told herself that it would be all quite easy; they two would revert naturally to the frank camaraderie of Mallacombe. They would smile at the same jokes, and make use of the quaint vocabulary they had coined together, and she would call him John Knox when he became too serious.

But when she met him at the station, the easiness became constraint. She had not reckoned on two important factors in the situation: Clement was in love, and Claudia and the others were not there. He sprang out of his third-class carriage almost before the train had stopped, and seized her hands eagerly.

"Hasil," he said, his rather boyish voice deep with his feeling, "is this glorious thing true, or am I dreaming?"

"True, Clement; quite true—though I don't know how glorious you'll find it. But come along—Wide-awake doesn't like standing."

She knew her light tone had jarred him, but somehow she could not bear that note of feeling in his voice—there was nothing in her to respond to it. As they were driving home she tried to pitch their conversation in the key she wished.

"You're quite glum, Clement," she said, when more than half the journey had been traversed in silence.

"Are you afraid I shall drive Wideawake into the hedge if you talk, or are you collecting arguments to assail me on the old vexed question of women preaching?"

He turned and looked at her.

"Neither, dearest. I was thinking how wonderful it is that love has come to us, and that you should care for me as I have always cared for you."

Hasil flicked Wideawake with the whip so sharply that the mare started violently. In all the time that her young mistress had driven her, she had never so much as touched her with the lash. If she wanted her to go faster, she knew, surely, that she had only to say so—what made her so unkind to-day?

"After all, you see, Clement," Hasil was saying, "it doesn't do for me to discuss serious questions or even listen to them when I'm driving. How is Mallacombe?"

Clement told himself it was natural that she should be shy, should shrink from discussing things that meant so much to her. Afterwards, when the first constraint had worn off, she would turn to him and share the precious secrets of her heart with him. For the rest of the drive, they talked of Mallacombe, and Hasil teased him for not laughing over the foibles of Mrs Jarvis, who made much capital out of her rheumatism, and speedily invested it in a species of strong drink she called "ma comfort."

But he was a little hurt that Hasil made no opportunity for them to be alone together that first evening. Just before ten she got up suddenly, having refused to sing on the plea that she was too tired, and said she was going to bed.

"Good-night, Clement," she said gently, coming over to the corner where he sat, and putting her hand in his.

"Good-night, Hasil," he answered, and then added beneath his breath: "my little love!"

But she did not seem to hear, and she would not meet his eyes, and when he hurried out after her to light her candle, he only saw her flitting like a white ghost along the corridor above his head, at right angles to the staircase.

It did not matter; it was right that it should be like this, and he loved her better for it. He was perfectly certain that Hasil could never have said she would marry him, unless she cared for him heart and soul. He was sure that at Mallacombe he had seen far enough into the depths of her nature to know that the readiness of the average girl of his acquaintance to "fold hands over the wedding-ring" would not be understood by Hasil. (He was good-looking enough to have been run after by several more or less attractive Mallacombe damsels, but in spite of the thinly veiled support of their mammas, he had escaped their blandishments.) He had for Hasil the passionate love which that man achieves who mates strength of feeling with stainless purity of living. She was the first woman in his life, as she would be the last. It seemed to him as he fell asleep under the same roof that sheltered Hasil, that life had nothing more to offer—he was king of his fate.

It was striking six the next morning when Hasil stole out of doors with her bicycle, and mounting it, rode down the beech avenue to the highroad. It was a grey morning, but there was no wind, and everywhere there seemed to be an underlying sense of expectation and

excitement, that spoke to her and soothed her strained nerves more effectually than the most peerless beauty of sun and sky could have done. At a bend in the road she saw the sea, and wished, as she so often did, that it were not so far away. It was the sea that was calling her now—calling her to plunge her body, fevered with the harassing doubts of the night, among those myriad snow-capped waves, and be at peace. But five miles from Castle Holme there was a lake called simply by the villagers, “the Big Water,” and that was better than nothing, and all she had time for. Using a dilapidated old boathouse in the last stage of tumble-downness for bathing-hut, she was very soon ready, and took a clean header from its rickety steps. The shock of the cold water took her breath for a moment, but presently her whole body answered to the bracing exhilaration. She felt like a young goddess in her strength—after all, while life held moments like these, it was good to be alive. Her own physical power was impelling her to breast the water; this force of hers was driving back and resisting the force of the water. Then, as she lay on her back presently, gazing up at the grey clouds that were already beginning to make way for the sun, she thought of Clement. Was she bound to tell him about Adrian or not? She had at first intended to do so, but now that he was here, in the flesh, things looked so different. If he knew, he would wonder sometimes whether she were giving him her best; he might even come to guess what it had all meant to her. She had the wounded animal’s instinct for concealing its hurt; the gentlest pity would be agony; and besides, Clement was to be her husband, and would not perhaps feel pity for a matter that

reflected on her allegiance to him. He would never understand—his was the simple nature, prone to analysis neither of itself nor others, lacking the intuitive sympathy which is often allied to introspection, but atoning in goodness and frank simplicity. It was already a thing of the past; she was not wronging him in keeping it from him, it was nothing to do with him. It was to his advantage that he should never know, for such knowledge would have the result of making her self-conscious in all her dealings with him.

She dressed quickly, and rode home, entering the dining-room in the wake of Gwendolen Mary, the youngest of the female retainers, and only just in time for prayers.

But she could not hope to elude her fiancé during the whole of his stay. Aunt Selina ruthlessly brought about the climax she dreaded.

“Hasil, dear, will you take Mr Dale out with you to get flowers?” she said, as soon as breakfast was over. “The Brackenridges are coming to lunch, and I want the table to look nice.”

Once in the quiet old garden, Clement turned to her.

“Dearest, you can’t, you mustn’t go on avoiding me. Believe me, I do understand. I’ll be very gentle with you, dear one, but I can’t bear to feel you avoid me.”

He took her left hand as it hung limply down at her side and slipped a plain circlet of seed-pearls on her third finger.

“Look at the words inside, darling,” he said. “It belonged to my great-grandmother, and has been in the family for I don’t know how long.”

She took it off, and could just see, faintly graven

inside, and much worn with its years of guarding troth: *Faithfull till Dethe*.

"Oh, Clement, how beautiful!" she cried. "You are very good to me, you know, and you're going to be dreadfully disappointed presently."

"I shall try to bear with it, Hasil," he said, smiling, and took her in his arms and kissed her. "Do you know you are the most beautiful woman in the world?"

A strange sense of faintness had come over her with his kiss. It was as if she had been given ether, and could no longer feel anything acutely. She had none of the resentment she expected to experience, she just felt numbed. Each word he said salved her bleeding pride; he thought her beautiful, it seemed wonderful to him that she could care.

"No, I'm not, you silly old boy—but I'm awfully glad you think so, all the same! And you must keep on telling me you love me—women never tire of being told that!"

"And I shall never tire of the telling, dear."

Presently, when they had taken the flowers into the house and were out again on the velvety slope leading to the croquet lawn, Hasil spoke:

"Clement, will you want me to be very good and clergyman's-wife-ish? Because I can't sew, and I'm no good at getting up bazaars, and I do rather like a cigarette now and again."

A shadow passed over his face.

"It would be useful if you could sew, dearest, for mothers' meetings and that sort of thing, but perhaps you could learn a little about it before we are married. I don't think bazaars will happen very often up in

Graydales, so you needn't worry about that. But I'm afraid I *do* think it will be better if you don't smoke, Hasil. You see, I don't myself, so that I shall not set a bad example to the boys of my parish, and it would be likely to have a pernicious effect if you did."

"Good heavens, I'm sure I don't want to have a pernicious effect on anybody! I don't mind giving up cigarettes and French novels and Turkish delight and anything else you like, but I do rather fear, Clement, that I'm fundamentally unsuited for the situation."

"Sweetheart, don't be flippant," he chided gravely.

"Clement, the real fact is that *you* are unsuitable as a husband for *me*! The horrid fact is breaking in on me that you are seriously deficient in a sense of humour!"

"I am only too conscious I'm deficient in heaps of things, dear, but one can try——"

"I really don't think you'd better try for a sense of humour! It's a case of '*Nascitur, non fit*,' and the last state of you would be infinitely worse than the first."

He did not answer.

"Clement, you are to stop beheading innocent daisies and tell me seriously whether you think it matters that I'm not godly?"

"But you *are* godly, Hasil, darling, as I understand it. Only you are very young now, and going through a disturbing time, and your ideas haven't crystallised. We have the same values for big things and big ideas, haven't we, dearest?"

"I don't know, Clement—I suppose so."

They had frequent talks after this, and she liked him better each time. She once told Claudia that she always

saw people's minds in landscapes. Adrian's had been a stretch of moorland, bleak and harsh, except to those who love it, and know the wonder of its heather-bloom, and its fragrance, and its songs of bird and breeze and stream. Claudia's was parkland with great old trees, and deer, and ancestral towers in the background. She decided now that Clement's was like a square in a "good" London neighbourhood—very trim paths, and very smooth lawns, and very bright flowers. Just a little spoilt, perhaps, by the fact that you were not allowed to walk on the lawns or pluck the flowers, but with real charm of its own. He never seemed to get impatient with her, though he was quite obviously taken aback by some of her ideas.

"His own views may be limited, bless him!—but I *think* he'll give me room," she thought, as she waved her hand to his departing train. "And there is something staggering in the thought of how much he loves me. I wish—oh, how I wish!—I were good enough for him."

She was very thankful that the vacation was so nearly at an end. Perhaps when she was really in the Oxford atmosphere again, the old interest would revive. It was very curious, but at present it did not seem to matter *who* wrote "*Arden of Feversham*," and she had even caught herself wondering dispassionately whether one did not take Wordsworth too seriously at Oxford. For Clement's sake she hoped her enthusiasm would come back; he wanted her to take her "Schools" the following June, and be married in the September.

Of Adrian she thought as of one dead, or as we think of a stranger with whom we have been on very intimate terms in the upside-down world of dreams—so that

when we meet him afterwards we feel a sense of ridiculous shame, because of the unfair advantage we have, as it were, over him.

Their love was as unreal, as little to be understood, as death or dreaming.

CHAPTER XVIII

At first she was unfeignedly glad to be back in college. Autumn is nowhere more beautiful than in and around the wonderful city of dreaming spires—it is as if she strove to create a loveliness of body which shall not shame the spiritual loveliness of the idea which is Oxford. Autumn understands the spirit of contemplation which broods for ever among the ancient towers and peaceful quadrangles; for both Autumn and Oxford the Past is infinitely greater than the Present, but the Future greater than either. So in the Michaelmas term they share a common sadness for the leaves which are fallen, for the beauty which can never be again—but shining through that gentle melancholy, as a silver edge divides wan clouds, is the bright promise of future life, which, it may be, shall be nearer to perfection than before. Those who find in Oxford only a wistful regret for the Past have missed her tenderest self, just as those who see only sadness in the autumn-time are blind to her deepest significance. . . .

Something of this was passing through Hasil's mind as she and Claudia walked silently along the upper river the first Sunday in term—and she murmured softly to herself :

“Death, there is not any Death! only infinite change,
Only a place of life which is novel and strange. . . .
Life following Life for ever. . . .”

“Why is it, Claudia,” she broke out, turning to her

friend suddenly, "that when one thinks of the scheme of things as a whole it seems right, but when one looks at individuals it seems frightfully wrong, and one doesn't know how to bear it?"

"Isn't it because Nature—as far as I can see—doesn't provide for individuals? Her business is to produce the perfect type, and even if a good many insignificant atoms are wasted in the process, she knows she is able to use them up in some other form—just as one's cook, you know, makes all sorts of little funny-shaped cakes for tea out of the pastry trimmings."

"Yes, that's all very well, but what's the good of spending our lives developing our ego and trying to find out how to make the best of ourselves, if all the time our only importance is that we form the trillionth fraction of one of a trillion types?"

"I don't think it's quite like that, Hasil. Individuals do matter in a way; it is our business to make the best thing of our lives and ourselves as individuals in order that the best types may be perpetuated. When I said Nature didn't provide for individuals, I meant that she doesn't concern herself with the actual effect of it all on any one person—she is too intent on her main purpose, the production of ultimate perfection. She's so much more impersonal altogether than you want to make her. Who was it said 'In Nature there are no punishments and no rewards, only consequences'? I think that expresses it to me."

"Do you know, I sometimes wonder how we two ever could have become friends? You're so—so scientific and philosophic, Claudia, and I can't reason things out like that at all. I want life—bright, warm life, with flowers and sunlight and music. I can't make it *matter*

that if I renounce that rose and hug this thorn my particular type will be benefited hundreds of years hence. I want to be happy in my own little seventy years, that's all."

"Perhaps it's just because we're different that we've got so much use for each other. But I'm not aware that I'm 'scientific and philosophic' enough to do without the flowers and sunlight and music that may come my way."

Claudia spoke rather bitterly, and Hasil felt that she had hurt her.

"But I'm paying you the highest tribute I can, Claudia," she exclaimed. "You're so much better than I am altogether."

"That's absolute rot, of course. The difference is in our temperament, not in our respective fitness for heaven. It might come somewhere near the truth to say that you're a Romantic and I'm a Classic—and my ideal, you see, happens to be Romantic, which is awkward for me. What do you do when you yearn to create Elizabethan lyrics out of an intelligence whose natural food is geometrical riders and sums about bath-taps? I took literature out of sheer cussedness; I could have done myself ever so much more justice in mathematics or classics. It's just the same with music. I can't play Chopin, and I can play Beethoven and Bach, and with all my might I want to play Chopin. I think when Providence was fitting souls into the neat little body-homes standing ready for them, the label came off mine, and my soul was put into a body that didn't belong to it."

"Claudia, don't talk such nonsense! You'd know what misfits were if you had my mechanism to deal

with ! My soul-mould got broken somehow and had to be patched up with whatever scraps came to hand, so instead of one whole person, I've got fifty thousand little people inside, all speaking different languages. I said just now I wanted all the living I could get into my time, but often and often I feel like the old woman who left on a bit of paper that was found when she'd committed suicide : ' Tired of buttoning and unbuttoning ! ' "

" Why, whatever would Clement say if he heard you ? "

" Yes, Clement—whatever *would* he say ? " Hasil's tone was dry, and Claudia threw a swift glance at her. She was the last person in the world to take what her friend told her at other than its face value, and it would have been generally almost as impossible to criticise Hasil's affairs, even to herself, as to read one of her letters, or overhear a conversation not meant for her. But since Hasil had told her on Friday of her engagement to Clement Dale, disturbing thoughts had troubled her once or twice. It was quite natural of Hasil to wish to tell her face to face of so vital a happening ; but wasn't it a little strange that she had never mentioned Clement since that Easter at Mallacombe, except in the most casual manner ? And what of Adrian Harding ? Surely, surely she had not imagined that wonderful radiance that had seemed to invest her friend that day last summer ? Or might it, could it have been that she saw what was not there, simply because it mattered so much to her—that she had been torturing herself for nothing ? Did life, after all, hold promise of beauty and of fulfilment ?

She went on talking as evenly as usual, conscious

all the time of a swirling undercurrent of thought. They discussed the Principal's attitude to the engagement and decided (in their magnanimity !) that she was right. Miss Ranmore had regretted it could not have waited until Hasil's schools were over, on the ground that its claims would be too absorbing to allow her work a fair chance.

Presently they sat down on a fallen tree-stump, whose roots made it look like the skeleton of a giant hand and arm, black against the grey of the sky. Hasil thought of what Adrian had said of Oxford's grey days that first time they met.

"It is quite true," she said dreamily, "nothing could be a more artistic background than grey. Look how the most delicate branches show against it, they might almost be shadow-trees."

"Quite true," said Claudia, who was dividing the little pile of sandwiches into those which had mustard and those which hadn't. "Whose was the great thought?"

But Hasil had bent down to wrestle with a refractory shoelace, and Claudia went unanswered.

When they had spread a banquet of crumbs for the birds, and carefully buried the paper bag, Claudia put an arm through Hasil's, as she was turning over the leaves of the thin red volume they always carried on their walks.

"What shall we have?" Hasil asked. "I vote for 'Enter these Enchanted Woods.'"

"One question first, Hasil. It's a bit difficult, because it sounds impertinent somehow, but I love you so much, dearest, that I must ask it. Are you happy?—really, truly, inevitably happy?"

"Why, yes, Claudia—really, truly, inevitably. You've got to allow for my temperament, you know. Directly a thing belongs indisputably to me I always begin thinking that there may be something more valuable that *isn't* mine. But at least I know Clement is much too good for me, and I do go down on my knees and 'thank heaven fasting' occasionally."

The Critical Person who dwelt in Claudia detected a note that jarred in this overmuch protesting, and all her loyalty could not quite silence him. Surely a monosyllable suffices to express great happiness? Was it possible that Hasil had mistaken Adrian's friendship for a deeper feeling? Or had Adrian himself not cared as much as he thought at first?

"I think I understand," was all she said. "No; let's have 'Phœbus with Admetus.' " It seemed to her that the translucent sincerity of thought and feeling radiating through "The Woods of Westermain" must shut her and Hasil out—they dared not enter.

And, indeed, as the term drew on, Claudia could not help noticing traits in her friend that were evidences of a strange something she did not understand—that was unworthy of Hasil. For one thing, she was extraordinarily self-conscious, and in a less pleasing way than before. Formerly it had merely made her too shy with strangers, as a rule, to do herself justice; she was at her best with those she knew and loved. Now she seemed to be always hungering for admiration and longing to know what people thought of her.

"Did they mention me when I had gone?" was a favourite question of hers. "Do you think they like me?"

It was incredible to Claudia that Hasil should not

see the indelicacy—dishonesty almost—of such a query—Hasil, who was always so sensitive and sympathetic. She suffered much at this time silently. Hasil and her father were the two people who “counted” to her, and she was of that fibre which will endure to the uttermost limit in the cause of friendship. She told herself that Hasil’s mental poise was disturbed by the great thing that had happened to her; presently she would be her old self. But it was very difficult to look on, as it were, and watch a person you so loved and admired constantly falling below her own standard. For instance, it was no doubt the right and proper thing for third-years to establish a certain amount of cordial relationship between themselves and the “freshers” that each October term brought, though it was an understood thing that the lion’s share of the responsibility should devolve on the second-years, as being people of more leisure. So that there was not sufficient excuse for Hasil’s going out of her way to ask them so frequently to tea, to fix up walks with all of them in turn, and to select two for special patronage, visiting them in their rooms evening after evening, when both she and they should have been working.

“It isn’t as if she were doing it in kindness to them, you know,” the Critical Person urged. “It’s only because she’s so desperately anxious they shall like her.”

It was a time-honoured custom in St Frideswide’s that the last Saturday evening in the Michaelmas term should be celebrated by an impromptu fancy-dress dance. Expensive costumes “from home” were discouraged, and ingenuity was distinction. Up to the last moment Hasil said she was undecided what she

should be, and when Claudia went to her room for her opinion as to the "hang" of her Fair Rosamond draperies, she found the door locked. Hasil's voice from within irritably called to her to go away, she would be down in a minute.

Rather sore at heart, Claudia went downstairs. The scene was a merry one. The dining-hall tables had all been cleared away, and there was a gay bevy of fisher girls, Carmens, Little Miss Muffets and the rest—a rather quaint contrast being afforded by two soberly garbed Quakers, who walked demurely through the chattering crowd, never lifting their eyes from their books. Claudia herself came in for a good deal of admiration. Her fair hair and noble face made her a veritable Rosa Mundi: for her under-robe she had ruthlessly sacrificed her best nightdress, stencilling a bold design of conventional roses round its hem—over this was thrown a rose velvet garment which had long done duty as an opera cloak. But her beautiful hair was braided and filleted with gold spangly stuff, and she looked a bride royal enough for any monarch.

She was laughing with Freda Beauchamp over the antics of two impudent little "freshers" who were thoroughly enjoying themselves as Tweedledum and Tweedledee, when she was conscious that a sort of hush had come over the room, and looked up to ascertain its cause. Hasil stood in the doorway—at least, *was* it Hasil? She was so beautiful and so—different. Her forehead was bound with a curious Oriental jewel and chain she habitually wore round her neck, and her dusky hair reached far below her waist. Swathing her slim young body were folds and folds of gauzy white drapery, and over this again was a *saree* of wonderful

rose-coloured brocade, embroidered and edged with dull gold tissue. The draperies fell away from her arms and left them bare, clasped with heavy gold un-English-looking bracelets. Her eyes blazed in her pale face, and her finger-nails were reddened as with henna.

She was different. Every one of those girls, not susceptible as a whole to mental atmosphere, knew that this was not the same Hasil who shared their games, and went to lectures. A faint colour began to glow through the olive of her cheek. She was obviously excited. Then the gaiety broke out again, louder than ever after the momentary stillness—Miss Lathom certainly looked splendid, but time was short, and must not be wasted. Claudia refused to dance, and passed out of the hot dining-hall into the quiet moonlit garden beyond. Turning presently at a slight sound, she found Hasil beside her.

“Hasil, dear, I don’t think you ought to be out here, you’ll catch cold.”

“Oh, Claudia, never mind about ought and oughtn’t. Just tell me what you think of me.”

“You’re beautiful,” said Claudia slowly, “and you know it. Who are you meant to be?”

“I am the Bél-Princess, my Claudia. She lived in a Bél fruit, which is like a pear, only much larger. The jealous spite of the usual stepmother imprisoned her there, and she was as beautiful as Night is in the East, with hair and eyes like mine. And she hung on her tree, and always just out of reach; none could pluck her, though many tried. And one day a young Rajah came riding by, and he was as glowing and glorious as the Dawn, and when he reached out of his saddle to pluck the fruit it yielded easily to his grasp. And he

cut it in half with his sword, and lo!—the wonderful Bél-Princess inside. So they were married that same night, and the gods gave them many children.”

Claudia could see that she was trembling from head to foot.

“What made you think of it, Hasil?” she said, not knowing how to express anything of what she felt, and afraid of saying something that might jar on Hasil’s nerves in their present abnormal state.

“I remembered it just as Jochabed, my ayah, told it me years ago, on the Maidan in Calcutta. Father gave me the *saree* and jewels. I don’t know how he got them.”

“But why do you enjoy being the Bél-Princess so much?” Claudia persisted. “It’s because you enjoy it so that you look beautiful.”

“There are more things, *ma mie*, in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in even *your* well-balanced and perfectly satisfactory philosophy. Perhaps in one of my lives I was a peerlessly beautiful Ranee, who held her lord’s heart and her people’s happiness in the hollow of her little hand. . . . I’m going in now. If I don’t see you again, don’t forget to tell me what they really thought of me. I rather enjoyed my royal entrance. Good-night!”

And she vanished into the stream of light that poured from the uncurtained windows, leaving Claudia with that sore feeling she had experienced so often lately in her friendship with Hasil.

It was as if a door were shut in her face upon the Hasil she knew, leaving an unlovable, often unadmirable Hasil outside on sentry duty.

Mr Mildmay threw partial light on her distress early

in next term by a critical remark on one of her essays on "Paradise Lost."

"You don't indicate the deterioration that is evident in the characters of both Adam and Eve after the Fall," he said.

And from that they had somehow drifted to a discussion of what makes for mental deterioration.

"Some people will tell you that too much happiness is bad for one," Mr Mildmay continued. "But I don't hold that view myself for an instant. There can't be such a thing as too much happiness, in the true sense of the word, for any human being. It's food and light and air. Where you see deterioration there has been unhappiness, I am quite sure of it."

Claudia, walking home through the golden afternoon, was thinking deeply. If what he had said were true, and what she herself saw were true, Hasil *was* unhappy. Both her premises seemed sound enough. Mr Mildmay's value as a critic of literature was based on his sound judgment of, and insight into, human nature. And she herself loved Hasil far too dearly to notice any difference in her until it was thrust upon her past all ignoring. Hasil was not happy. But that first Sunday in term she had emphatically declared she was. Well, everybody of any experience was agreed that whether you were happy or not the engagement period was a wearing one. Perhaps Hasil's work was worrying her; Claudia knew that that too was not as satisfactory as it had been, and last summer she had confessed to her how dearly she coveted a First.

Claudia's brain was of the type that would have worried a less personal problem, as a dog worries a

rat, till it had shaken the truth out of it, but it always seemed a disloyalty to Hasil to go on with her thinking, and she tried to put it from her. Yet a shadowy something stood between them and the perfect intimacy of their friendship, and made that friendship a less ideal thing.

Hasil felt the change herself. In these days she was lonely, with the loneliness she had only known in dreams; as if she were the only dumb person in a circle of people chattering and laughing, or as if she were walking in a fog that never lifted to let her see the faces of her fellow-wayfarers. Even Claudia seemed to speak another language, and Hasil, with the morbid sensitiveness that was her heritage, was acutely conscious of her unspoken criticism, and exaggerated it. She cut herself off from her contemporaries, and took to going long walks either by herself or with some one of the younger freshers, whose artless adulation was a balm for her sore spirit. She would brood all day and far into the night over her father's letter to her, and force herself to recall everything she could remember of her life in India those fifteen years. When she first came to England her mind was too busy storing up fresh impressions to occupy itself much with hoarding the old; she had adapted herself very easily to the new mode of living, and it had not occurred to her to be contrasting constantly with it the totally different life she had known. Looking back now, she wondered how she could have been so faithless. Little by little, as a melody long forgotten comes back almost note by note, irrelevant scraps of reminiscence were crowding in upon her. Dark turbaned faces, wonderful snow ranges up at Darjiling, purple in the sunset, odd little Hindustani

phrases, *tik-tiks* [lizards] scampering over the room-walls during the rains, and a thousand more—some wonderful, some pretty—but all dear to her now, since India was her mother's land. She seemed to herself to be really alive only when her spirit was away from England, back again in the East. Clement Dale mattered very little to her. He was there in the background, a figure that would have to be reckoned with presently, but at present not counting for very much. He made but small claim upon her; his letters arrived regularly on Fridays, but he understood that she was working hard and could only write him short answers. He could afford to wait.

She thought very seldom of the future at first, dwelling in the saddest of all cloud-cuckoo lands, a world she had built for herself out of the ruins of the past.

And then one day she met Adrian. It was a cold, rather gloomy afternoon, and she had gone to Blackwell's for a book she wanted, and, having made her purchase, had stayed to browse in that delightful pastureland of books. Glancing up from a valuable copy of "*Hudibras*," tenanted by a large family of bookworms and adorned with wonderful woodcuts, she looked straight into his eyes as he stood opposite. He looked pale and thin, his eyes gleamed out of his face like the coal of a dying fire in a dark room, and there was a rather unpleasant look in them. Her whole being was instantly dominated by one wish—not to let him see that any of it had mattered.

"How do you do?" she said. "I didn't even know you were in Oxford."

(A curiously detached thought shaped itself simul-

taneously with her words : " He looks like an illustration to Byron.")

He muttered something she did not catch in reply and turned to an assistant with a request. When he had finished she took a step towards him.

" You must congratulate me before you go. I am engaged to be married to a Mr Dale, who used to be Vicar of Mallacombe. I had hoped to see you ; I knew you would be interested."

He congratulated her rather incoherently, and then she was in the Broad, walking furiously in the direction of St Frideswide's. She did not know exactly what she had said. She was only deeply thankful that she had done what she set out to do. He could never tell himself she cared, never know what he had done.

She dared not let herself think of how his changed looks had appealed to the mother in her, how she longed to draw his head down to her, and tease him and talk sweet nonsense to him till he looked more himself. It was safer to think of that indefinably unpleasant look in his eyes, and the grim pallor of his face.

" Indigestion, I expect," she said savagely ; " that's generally what's the matter with men when they look like Byron illustrations."

She turned in at the lodge gates, and hurried through the garden and upstairs to the door of a tiny room, where she knocked. Inside, an untidy-looking little person of about nineteen was reading " Jude the Obscure " over the fire.

" Put that away, Bunny," she commanded ; " you won't be old enough for another twenty years, if then. . . . For pity's sake make me some tea and give

me some bread to be toasting. There's an east wind outside, and God hates me."

The small "fresher" hurried downstairs for milk, her blue eyes round with admiration. How clever Miss Lathom was! She was not sure whether it was a cleverness of which her mother would approve, but if you came to college you had to put away childish things and choose your own friends.

CHAPTER XIX

OTHERS beside Claudia had begun to notice the change in her friend. The Principal, having eyes that saw a good deal further than many people guessed, perceived with disfavour that Miss Lathom seldom seemed to be with students of her own year. Miss Ranmore did not altogether believe in friendships between seniors and first-years; sometimes it would be a genuine and a fine thing, but her experience had taught her that more often it was kindled by the fires of a *Schwärmerei* that ought to have been extinguished in high school days. It was more serious in girls of this age—detrimental to both parties, and unworthy of the high ideals of a college community. So when she saw Miss Lathom constantly accompanied by two or three satellites of very youthful appearance, and corresponding immaturity of character, Miss Ranmore was not pleased. Would she have been wiser, after all, to have refused to sanction the engagement? It was not only that she saw so much of the younger and more frivolous type of first year; it was that in countless ways, indefinable and imperceptible except to a keen observer, she was wanting in *esprit de corps*. She had resigned the sub-captaincy of the fire brigade on the plea of work, she was never seen in a boat, though she usually went down to the river for a solitary swim in the early morning, and she never spoke in "Parliament," and rarely attended. If it was the result of work, it was excusable,

though deplorable, but was it? If she could go all-day expeditions in her "Schools" term with Miss Fletcher and Miss Graham, she could put in a "fire-practice" and take a boat out. She decided to consult Miss Lathom's house-tutor, and visited her one evening in May with that intention.

Miss Fairbank was not encouraging.

"It is too bad," she said irritably. "Hasil Lathom looked like shaping into a certain first-class candidate last summer. She had originality, feeling for style, grip of facts, everything that goes to make a student of literature, and at the end of her second year she'd pulled her language up extraordinarily. And now her work is absolutely different. No *flavour*—no individuality—sometimes rather sickly, sometimes sheerly colourless. It's most disappointing!"

"Who else coaches her?" asked Miss Ranmore.

"Mr Mildmay and Mr Zingl—and they've noticed it too. Mr Mildmay asked me to see she didn't overwork, as her essays seemed a little stale lately, and Mr Zingl was in despair over her Middle English Collections. It does seem a pity; I wish she could have waited another year to be engaged."

"I don't think it's the mere fact of her being engaged, Betty," said Miss Ranmore. "Unless I'm a very bad judge of character, she is just the type of girl to turn out very much better work under the stress of great happiness."

"But is she so very happy?" Betty Fairbank asked. "If so, why does she go about with those idiotic little first-year people while Claudia Maxwell reads in the garden every afternoon, looking miserable?"

"I'm afraid I assumed the happiness. My incurable

optimism always forgets to allow for those people who enter into a promise of marriage, not expecting ideal happiness from each other. And I should have said Miss Lathom was incurably sentimental in that respect too ! ”

“ I haven’t ever known you wrong in your judgment of character.” And those rather hard brown eyes looked very lovingly at the Principal. “ But you may be quite right, and yet there may be something at the back of it all acting as a contrary influence.”

“ I hope not, indeed.” Miss Ranmore rose to go. “ Perhaps you’ll get an opportunity at one of her revision coachings, Betty, to say you’re disappointed in her work, and don’t quite understand the falling off. . . . What a glorious night ! ”

The Principal moved to the window and looked out. A blackness that seemed the blackness of velvety purple pansies gathered the sleeping garden in its arms; the fragrant breath of flowers was like the tangible beauty of a child or a young girl—the stars were silver lamps burning low in a bride-chamber.

“ The setting is perfect. We only want Lorenzo and his Jessica. . . . Good-night, dear. Do your best for Miss Lathom, won’t you? ”

But if Miss Ranmore could have seen the subject of their conversation at that minute, she would have felt very little hope of improvement. Backwards and forwards across the damp, soft grass Hasil was pacing ceaselessly, unable to work and unable to go to bed and sleep. A night like this always woke her suffering to life again—such nights were made for lovers, and she had been thrust out of Eden. Her chance encounter with Adrian had made it doubly hard; had stung her

afresh with the knowledge of how irrevocable was the love she had given him. She could not call it back even if she would. The thought of enduring the intimacy of marriage with Clement Dale made her cold with a sick horror; for now she was always thinking of the future. But she had pledged her word to him, and she had told Adrian—there was no going back: she felt a wild and helpless wood-thing caught in a trap man's cruelty had set for her. She shrank from the silent pain in Claudia's eyes. Claudia did not understand, and Claudia must not understand. She avoided her as she avoided anyone else who might wish, either from curiosity or solicitude, to probe this wound. "Bunny" Fletcher and Maisie Graham had no such wish—they took her for what she seemed to their somewhat verdant selves to be, a brilliantly clever person and a mighty third-year. In their company she need not be on her guard, and their admiring flattery, though it sometimes nauseated her, could not hurt as a friend's questions or, worse still, a friend's silence, might have done.

It was the future that seemed so hopeless. The golden spell of Oxford had faded a little, but it was still Oxford, whose beauty and tranquillity had power to bless. Her work had lost its virility, she knew, and philology seemed once more an intolerable waste of time; but, even so, the wonderful poetry and drama of the Elizabethan period, on which she was concentrating the efforts of this last term, fed her emotion if it could no longer stimulate her intellect. What was left her if she broke her promise to Clement, and went back on those words in Blackwell's? Life at Castle Holme would *kill* her. The reasons for which she had accepted her fiancé last summer were every bit as potent now,

and she said to herself shamedly that, in a way, he would take the place of Bunny and Maisie.

There was no doubt that he loved her very dearly. Her thoughts went back to an evening in the Christmas vacation, when he and she had been staying with his mother and Major Lascelles down at Mallacombe. Clement had gone in to see the landlady of "The Tippling Pedagogue," who had been very ill with rheumatic fever. She had waited for him in the best parlour, idly turning over the leaves of the shiny black Visitors' Book. "God is Love, Clara Brugg," she read, and thought it a pity that the possessor of such pious sentiments should own to a name so unpleasing. Then from among many eulogies of mine host's hospitality, often in "poetry" by those who saw here their sole chance of fame, the name of Adrian Harding stared out at her, neat and curt, amid the sprawling wordiness of its companions :

Adrian Harding	} 1st Sept.-15th Sept.
C. R. Roberts	

Why had he come? Her reflections had been interrupted by the entrance of Tryphena to make up the fire.

"Do you remember Mr Harding staying here last September, Tryphena?" she said. She had not meant to speak, but the question forced itself through her dry lips in spite of herself.

Tryphena's brow had blackened, and her whole face had a dogged, almost defiant look.

"Naw, that I doan't, miss. There be a main 'eap of genelman as comes vrom all parts, I reckon, and

I've more to do with ma time than bothering about they—fair deaved I'd be, and noa mistake."

She went, leaving Hasil with the impression that she remembered him perfectly, in spite of her reply. Adrian had always had a haughty, imperious way with his inferiors—she had noticed so much in their brief time together—and she supposed this independent and beautiful Devonshire girl had resented it. . . . Why had he come? Was it because she had been there that first Easter, or was it Mr Roberts' doing, whoever Mr Roberts was?

Clement, noting how pale and silent she was on the walk home, was silent too, thinking he had kept her waiting too long and she was vexed. But as they came down the cliff path, and were about to strike into the deep lane which led to Milverton, Major Lascelles' place, she flung herself suddenly into his arms.

"Oh, Clement, Clement," she had almost wailed, "promise me you'll always love me very much!"

It was the first sign of deep feeling she had ever shown him. He had kissed her lips and answered: "Next to God, my beautiful darling—for always."

And somehow that had convinced her of the great and unchangeable quality of his affection for her more than anything else could have done. Not only so, but coming just when that chance glimpse of the Visitors' Book had left her spirit aching and bruised, it made him, for the first time, necessary to her. He had comforted her at that moment just by making her sure of how much she was to him. If she could only decide what he really was to her! Sometimes his caresses were welcome to her, and it was almost as if she had waited for them, afraid of disappointment, till they

came ; at other times she could scarcely bear him to take her hand. Very likely she was morbid and introspective, and no doubt hundreds of other girls had felt and would feel just as she did. Everything would come right when once she was his wife. . . . Her head was aching, and people were coming out with their mattresses, laughing and talking—the peace and calm for which she had sought the garden this wonderful night could be hers no longer. She must go indoors and try to sleep. Sleep had deserted her lately, for the first time in her life. She had known *nuits blanches*, of course, but never this terrible insomnia night after night, when every nerve and faculty seemed stretched to all but breaking-point, and her brain was a thousand times more alert than in the day and tormented her with maddening little details.

The ugly embroidery on a girl's dress, for instance—it was of little fans, and each fan had five little sticks and a ring pierced through the sticks—and the fans were separated by dark blobs, and the whole was worked in three shades of extremely uninteresting brown. She mentally traced that pattern unerringly every night, and laboriously worked in every little fan and every little blob in those dreadful browns ; if she opened her eyes it unrolled itself like a scroll on the ceiling, or, if she were out of doors, on her white counterpane. Or she held long and utterly pointless conversations with people she hardly knew—one night it was with the little tailor she had encountered once over a matter of a flannel collar he was to make to order. And always at the back of her brain was the feeling that she was endlessly traversing a stretch of desert, and the sun was terrible, and there was

a hot wind which blew sand grains into her eyes. . . .

Miss Fairbank had decided that it was too late now to say anything about Miss Lathom's work—things must take their course. So her only remark was to the effect that she hoped Miss Lathom had made plans for going away for a few days before Schools. Miss Maxwell was going up to Boar's Hill and Miss Beauchamp to Long Wittenham—was Miss Lathom going with either of them?

No; Miss Lathom was doing nothing of the sort. Miss Fletcher and Miss Graham were taking her on the river every day and looking after her generally.

Miss Fairbank permitted herself something very like a sniff, and said she was surprised Miss Fletcher and Miss Graham had so much time to spare. But Hasil affected not to hear, having already discussed the subject at much length with an indignant and unusually heated Claudia.

"If you won't think of yourself, you might think of your college," had been her parting shot. "You owe it to St Frideswide's to do your level best. Do you think you're going the right way about it by listening to the baaing of those silly kids for three days?"

The first morning of Schools came—Hasil, ready a few minutes before the gong sounded, garbed in the sober colouring solicited by the Schools authorities (presumably that the male candidates' attention should not be distracted by the gay plumage of their sisters in suffering!), could not resist once more resorting to Dick's method. She found her finger on the words: *Then the woman went unto all the people in her wisdom*, and was still puzzling over its exact application in her

own case (it seemed as if it ought to mean something very profound) when the gong went for breakfast.

There was a ghastly gaiety about the Schools candidates as a whole. There was a table set apart for them and they had such delicacies at their disposal as scrambled eggs in plenty, and unlimited hot toast.

"Like choosing your breakfast the morning you're hanged!" said Claudia, who certainly looked nervous. Hasil was surprised that she herself felt so calm; her strongest sensation was one of annoyance that she should have to waste six hours of such a splendid day writing for dear life in a stuffy room. Why should Claudia's hand be shaky as she poured out her coffee? Everybody knew that she was an absolutely safe Second. And after all, why should it matter so much?

The first paper was the Beowulf paper, which consisted mainly of various passages for translation. She was glad to see her favourite "landscape bit" there, and arrogantly rendered it into metrical prose:

"... Secret the land,
 They dwell in! Wolf-slopes . Headlands windswept,
 Fenpaths right fearsome . Where the fell-stream
 'Neath mists from the Nesses Netherward windeth,
 Flood under the fields . . . No further hence
 Than a mile measure . . . Standeth the Mere!
 Over it hangeth A grove hung with hoar frost."

But the afternoon General paper brought despair. Some of the names in the questions were only names to her; there was nothing at all on which her brain could eagerly fasten. She devoted most of the three hours to an essay on the evolution of drama out of the old mystery plays. Claudia was rather tiresomely radiant.

She had the Spenser question for which she had prayed, and had liked the paper as a whole.

The week wore itself out. With the exception of the Shakespeare paper, nothing had appealed to her. She was betrayed in most cases by the gaps in her knowledge, which had widened lately where they should have narrowed, and the paper on the Elizabethan period, which was her "special" subject, and on which she had previously shown real power and originality, gave her no chance at all.

She and Claudia spent the Sunday, by special permission, on the river. They took the little *You and I* farther up stream than they had ever been before in her, until she was tangled in a maze of water-buttercups, and all but grounded on the shallow, pebbly bottom.

By tacit consent Schools were "taboo," though they talked of nearly everything else! It was more like one of the old happy days of their friendship than they had spent for a very long time, and they came back to college as all the bells were ringing for evensong, feeling the better for those hours of companionship.

"I'm one of the 'ships that pass in the night' now," thought Hasil. "Sometimes a light flashes across my decks, and a voice I care to hear hails me, but more often I'm journeying through foreign seas in the dark, alone!"

When she heard her name called for the "Viva," she felt something of the stage-fright from which many of her contemporaries had been suffering during the week. Instantly her mind became an utter blank, across which there flashed, like a lantern-slide thrown on to a screen, Miss Caxton's description of the great beasts full of eyes. Yes, there they were—a young dark one, a thin

fair one, and an old fat one. That impression faded, to be replaced by two doggerel lines from a source she strove to recall and could not :

“ O Samuel ! O Samuel !
Beware the awful Camuel ! ” . . .

But the thin fair one is speaking, asking her to tell them what she can of Cowper's letters. “ Cowper? Who was Cowper? ” All she can remember of him is that Uncle James calls him *Cowper*. No—stay—that passage in which he describes a group of minnows in the water, with their heads converging together so that they look like the petals of a wondrous water flower . . . and something about the Wine of Love and the Bread of Friendship. . . . No, that was Keats. She never knows what she has answered to the handful of questions those three put to her, but presently it is over, and she is out in the High with the others, dismissed by a grave “ That will do, thank you,” from the Terrible Trinity.

She is in a fever of impatience till the day of the results, and the sleeplessness is worse than ever. It is daily becoming plainer to her that she wants that First as badly as ever she wanted it. Can her work of the last year really have relegated her to the Seconds, or has she not done as badly as she thinks? She had made a complete ass of herself at the Viva—still, Vivas were said to benefit you, if possible, and in any case, not to count against you. A little before twelve she walks down to the Schools and finds herself all at once staring the eventful notice in the face :

WOMEN'S LIST.

First Class—Claudia Heriot Maxwell.

What an extraordinary thing ! and where is her own name? She looks down the lengthy column of Seconds and is relieved to find it is not there. Some stupid mistake, no doubt ; she has been accidentally left out. But that sense which draws one's eye irresistibly to one's own name, wherever it may be, draws hers now, and down in the Thirds, with no possibility of error, she sees clearly written : *Hasil Lathom*.

CHAPTER XX

THE days that followed the literature results were anything but pleasant ones for Hasil. Not only was her vanity (and something better) deeply wounded, but she had to suffer a good deal from her friends. There were those who felt the situation was beyond them, and so avoided her with sidelong conscious looks, "as if I'd embezzled the college funds, as the heroine of a college novel generally does," thought Hasil angrily. Some frankly condoled with her, and said it was "a beastly shame," a few (and these were the worst) had the impertinence to congratulate her. "On not failing?" she inquired blandly of one misguided person. "Thank you *very* much."

Her tutors preserved a frigid silence, with the single exception of Mr Mildmay. He met her soon afterwards in the Parks, and warmed her heart by telling her that he had always thought highly of her work, and that it was a very great pity the Elizabethan paper gave her no chance to display her real ability.

"Don't lose heart," he concluded, "examination results serve a certain purpose, but they are by no means the be-all and the end-all that many people here think them."

But that was the one drop of comfort in a bitter cup. Clement's letter irritated her thoroughly; it sounded so often the note of resignation to the Will of God, and ended with a sentence about the exceeding dross of

earthly crowns. She had gone straight to Claudia's room on her return from the Schools, with congratulations that were possibly too fervent, for Claudia only looked her straight in the eyes and said: "I'd have given all I have if it could have been you." Whereupon Hasil had put her head down on Claudia's ink-stained table and cried bitterly. In public, however, she carried her head high, and laughed and talked considerably more than usual, so that people said she had got over it very soon, and they supposed, as she was going to be married in September, she didn't care.

And indeed, after the misery of the first few days, she did try resolutely to fling herself into what was passing around her. The sands of her last precious days at Oxford were running out, and she clutched at them as a mother treasures the last few moments her son is with her before their first parting. The weather was cloudless, and she and Claudia spent the long days out of doors. Claudia's real love for her friend brought them together for the short time that was left. She grieved so sincerely over Hasil's Third, and it was so plain that her own First brought her no elation whatsoever.

"I never knew anyone who understood as much about loving as you do, Claudia," said Hasil one night as they lay side by side in the garden, talking in low whispers, so as not to disturb the sleepers near them.

"Oh, but I don't, dearest. People I love do matter very much more to me than anything else in the world, but if I really understood about loving, I shouldn't mind *for* them as much as I do. And I shouldn't keep fretting about our separation—yours and mine, I mean: I should know that souls are everything, and bodies

nothing. But bodies are such nice, warm, lovable things when they belong to one's friends! I know I shouldn't love you nearly as much disembodied!"

"I should like myself very much better. My body and I are anything but good friends—except in the sea, and then we love each other. But then I'm not good friends with anything just now, nor with anyone, except you, and I love you in spite of myself. I can't think why you're not an unspeakable prig—people with an attitude to life are apt to be prigs, as a rule."

"*That's* a bit sweeping! Have I got an 'attitude,' by the way? It might help me to know what it is."

"Yes, rather, I should think you have! In a former life you were a very strict Brahmin, with a tremendous regard for caste-observance, and very proud of your threefold cord. You strove to detach yourself from earthy ties, and to concentrate all your aspiration on the One outside all in Whom you were to obtain Nirvana. I don't know how you found yourself in a feminine body-house in England, but you straightway adapted all your characteristics to the demands of English country life and an Oxford college community, and you were so successful that you are let off several of your eighty-four hundred thousand lives, and are very near *Sayujyâ*!"

"Thanks awfully," chuckled Claudia. "I should feel rather more elated, though, if you'd explain exactly what I'm very near."

"*Sayujyâ*," said Hasil, and Claudia was sensitive to a note of feeling vibrating in her voice, "is the state of complete union with the Supreme, when trifles like Schools cease to matter, and there is no marrying nor giving in marriage. I don't know much about the old

Brahmin beliefs, but I've been reading up Buddhism a little lately, and that originated as a sort of protest against the caste restrictions of the Brahmins, you know. And some of it is simply grand, Claudia! Cold with the coldness of mountain-tops, but courageous, and so splendidly regardless of the mint, anise, and cummin of the Brahmins." And she murmured:

"Not by skins and plaited tresses,
Not by family and birth,
But by truth and righteous conduct,
Is the Brahmin known on earth."

"Yes; but, Hasil"—Claudia's face was hot, and she was glad of the dark—"the Christ-man's teaching reaches a height just as sublime, and yet it's warm with tenderness and love. Morality that *isn't* 'tinged with emotion' is not enough, surely. And isn't the Buddhistic standpoint a frankly agnostic one?"

"Yes; and I think the agnostic standpoint the only one to take up about religion. And as for tenderness—Buddha is much more real to me than Christ, because he knew what human love—the love of man and woman—meant. Christ didn't know that. And do you know that you'll find most of the Sermon on the Mount in the Buddhist teaching?"

"Yes; I know you do in 'The Light of Asia,' but that might only mean that Sir Edwin Arnold couldn't help putting his own faith into it. After all, 'The Light of Asia' isn't a translation, and it seems to me one must know the original text before one can speak at all. Besides, even if Buddha did preach a similar gospel to Christ's, five hundred years before Him, it only means, surely, that Truth and Goodness are one,

and not several. John the Baptist preached the necessity for repentance and heralded the coming of Christ, and Marlowe paved the way for Shakespeare—and Buddha foreshadowed the teaching of one greater than he."

"I don't agree—anyway, I'm not talking about 'The Light of Asia.' I've been reading literal translations from the Pitakas. Certainly truth and goodness are one, and you come to the same goal by many paths, and all that sort of thing. All I say is that I personally seem to have got more help lately from the vision which men saw for truth in India, somewhere about 500 B.C. Christianity throws you back on yourself; Buddhism lifts you out and up."

"Christianity insists on the value of the individual, but how can you say it throws you back on yourself, when the keynote of all its teaching is altruism?"

"You don't understand what I mean, Claudia, and anyway it isn't a thing to argue about. If I can better unravel this tangled skein we call living with my God than yours for clue, surely it is better to let me?"

"But I thought——" said Claudia, and then stopped.

"What did you think?" Hasil asked sleepily.

"Nothing; and if I did, the stars are putting it out of my head. Look at that splendid fellow between the poplar branches—I'm getting to know him now.

"... it stops like a bird—like a flower hangs furred,
They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it—
What matter to me if their star is a world?
Mine has opened its soul to me: therefore I love it."

"Who were 'they'?" said Hasil. But as Claudia did not answer, she went on gazing and gazing at the poplar

star, till it suddenly opened out and became a silver cyclamen. And the petals grew larger and more large as they unsheathed, till they curled down over and round her, and she lay cradled in radiance.

Claudia, watching her friend's face, so tranquil in sleep, was wakeful for several hours. It was all very well to talk of several paths to the same goal, but what of Clement? Clement's feet were set in the strait way of the Gospels, and what happiness could there be for Hasil in her married life unless she trod it beside him? She looked at her again as she slept with lips just parted, and hands peacefully folded. There were singularly few lines on her forehead or at her eyes, but she noticed new lines at the curve of each nostril and downwards from the corners of her mouth. Even now, as she moved slightly, her face took on a more dogged, almost grim look, and she seemed perceptibly older. It was no longer the face of a young and happy woman—it was tragic, inflexible. It might be that marriage would put things right. Some girls needed marriage more than others, and Hasil was always so hungry for emotion. She thought of Clement himself—would he be equal to the rather difficult rôle of Hasil's husband? Involuntarily she saw two mental pictures her memory photographed, and her heart misgave her. On one occasion he had been upholding with great seriousness Milton's attitude to women—on another he had been striving to relate a funny story funnily. In both cases he cut a sufficiently unheroic figure, but what caused Claudia's sudden misgiving was the memory of Hasil's little smile, half amused, half bored, wholly contemptuous. Could a union of that sort be for her happiness? Well, she could do nothing. Hasil's mind

was made up, and the bride's sense of humour could hardly be brought forward as "just cause or impediment." Clement was too much in earnest to have a sense of humour—keen reformers didn't seem to need it. Christ Himself made no use of it. And after all, it was some time since she had seen Clement; he might have developed or changed a good deal. In many ways he was a splendid person. . . . Then her thought hovered gently round a tiny little hope that had just found a home in her heart, so tiny that she was almost afraid to look at it for fear of frightening it away—and in her turn she fell asleep. . . .

The days slipped ruthlessly by for Hasil. Furniture-men, who seemed sacrilegious and entirely hateful, invaded the room that in three years had become so unthinkably dear, and callously packed up books and pictures and chairs, as if one left college every day. Dora, the little maid of fifteen who sometimes slipped up from the kitchen in pure love to mend her fire, or to bring her a hot-water bottle, wept copiously over a parting gift of the "Avenue of Middelharnis."

"Oughter put up lamp-posts on a wet road like that, hadn't they, miss," she sniffed bravely. "Not safe-like on a dark night, with all them puddles."

And then she mysteriously produced a parcel in many tissue-paper wrappings, which proved at length to be a kettle-holder. A yellow wool kettle reposed uneasily on a red wool fire, where black wool coals were boldly indicated, and underneath was written, for all who ran to read :

"When the kete's boiled for tea
Wrap its handle round in me.
So when Life's too hot to grasp,
You must first have Love to clasp. . . ."

In the middle of laughing over the "kettle's" lost "t," and thinking how much Uncle James would have appreciated the verse, something caught at Hasil's throat and she incontinently fled, muttering something about wanting to show her present to Miss Maxwell. It was as if everybody were conspiring to make it hard for her to leave. Bassett, the surly porter who had seemed to disapprove of her consistently, remarked: "I'm very sorry indeed you're going, miss. New faces don't make up for old ones—never you think that. But I'm sure I hope you'll be happy in the married state, though it's a big thing to take on—and a risky," he concluded darkly. Which was only bettered by Mrs Hodgate, her scout, who opined that 'usbands as didn't drink 'ad their use, she supposed, and so she 'oped Miss Lathom would find it. For her tutors, and her friends also, and even for the Oxford she knew and loved, Hasil felt that this was the real good-bye. She might come back, soon and often, but it would be different. Oxford as she knew it would lie in the future in the tiny area bounded by one train's arrival and another's departure—things would only combine to form the experience known to the Brushwood Boy as "Oxford-on-a-Visit." But Oxford herself would go on in the same way—autumn would mean chiefly the blood-red of the virginia-creeper leaves and hosts of freshers, spring would bring primroses and cowslips and Moderations, summer was a matter of fritillaries and wild roses and Schools, while she—Hasil—would be besieging a citadel of mystery for the keys of Living, perhaps of Dying. The possession of that Key of Living might bring her a new life—a life that should lie in her arms and look to her for its sustaining. In

the last week or two she had fastened hungrily on that idea in her desperate search to satisfy the ravening need of love in her. She shrank in all her being from the prospect of her coming marriage. Clement was only a chance encounter in one of many thousands of existences, necessary in this particular existence for the fathering of her child; one of the millions of atoms against which her soul had brushed its wings in its unstaying journey through the ages. Only those people mattered whom her soul acclaimed—Claudia, for instance, she had known all through her soul life, and Adrian too. The rest were incidents and accidents of an infinitesimal span of living.

This "going down" was, after all, but the exchange of thought for action. Oxford would write its books and win its Firsts, but she would create a thing greater than all those—a warm, living poem of flesh and blood.

She spent the last Sunday of all in a quiet corner of the old garden. Beyond, the river sang very quietly to itself of the slender beauty of yellow irises, and of their cold maidenhood—all around her were masses of lupins, white and blue, of sweet-williams and Shirley poppies. Up beside the porch wandered Mistress Dorothy Perkins, a wonder of rose and white, with her petals daintily curling back like a baby's fingers—all along the old-fashioned borders pansies were busy at their task of embroidery. Flowers and trees, birds and bees and river seemed to cry exultantly: "Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!" She had brought out a book, but the day called to her. How lucky she had been to have had the chance of these three years, in spite of all the sorrow they had brought! She would have been at Castle Holme now, eating her heart out in

miserable inaction, if it had not been for Miss Caxton. What a good friend she had been ! Hasil thought of what she had said about the words Oxford left on the soul of each one who passed through her hands. What had been inscribed on hers as a result of her sojourning ? What was she taking into that new life waiting for her, so appalling in its strangeness ? . . .

She phrased it at last as an utter need of beauty in the external world and in human relations. Nothing was necessarily ugly—everything that had a right to exist at all possessed an essential loveliness. It would be often very hard to find, but all the same it must be there. It would be hard, because at Oxford beauty, whether outward or internal, was there for the asking—other conditions of life, compared with that, would seem at first difficult and unlovely. But what was, all-important was that she should never for a moment cease to demand that beauty, nor be satisfied with a lesser thing. The great men, those who had led others, had taught that no life could be of itself common or unclean. Buddha and Christ had found beauty where others had passed it by. To find beauty others had ignored would seem to be in itself a condition of greatness, as Shakespeare and Traherne and Wordsworth were great. All great men were brothers because they shared this power of vision, and she, in as far as she strove to acquire it too, was, if only a humble camp-follower, a member of that great company journeying towards the Light. . . . She clung passionately to that thought, as she craned out of the railway carriage on the following day for a last look at towers and spires, blurred though they were with the tears of an ineffable regret. The abominable red-brick tenements that were

springing up with incredible rapidity seemed at first glance an ugly fungus-growth that spoiled their fairness—but that was only when she looked down at them. The next second she realised that the towers gazed all day into the sky, intent on the loveliness they understood—knowing nothing, therefore, of those little red-brick mushrooms at their feet. The inward life was everything, and all the rest nothing. And as Oxford was snatched from her sight, and the train rushed on, she cried to the emptiness of her dusty Third :

“Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory *shall* come in.”

CHAPTER XXI

"BUT I don't understand," said Clement.

It was a phrase that had fairly often found its way to his lips during—but seldom before—the last fortnight, for the good reason that in that last fortnight he had sometimes guessed himself to be confronted with the first really arresting problem of his life.

"Don't you, dearest?" said his wife, lazily lifting herself out of the warm sand on one elbow; "but there's nothing to understand in the statement that I'm surprised to find myself so very happy. It isn't a question of how much you love each other or anything of that sort—it's just that, as we always said at college, of all the uncomfortable things in the world a honeymoon is likely to be the uncomfortablest."

Clement Dale raised his eyebrows. "Did you discuss honeymoons at college?" he said.

"Oh, Clement, don't be so foolish! Of course we discussed everything at college—why not? Honeymoons, as much as, and not more than, Tariff Reform, or the Torrey-and-Alexander point of view. And I used to think that a honeymoon was one of those things that are beautiful to write or talk about, but most unpleasant to experience. I didn't look forward to it a bit, but now it's here I grudge every minute that's gone! . . . But then this place was foreordained for us, and I shouldn't be surprised if God had our honeymooning in His mind when He made it—should you?"

For a moment Clement Dale's face was overshadowed with a sternness that had often enough been reflected from the faces of his Calvinist ancestors, then it softened again as his glance fell on the youthful figure beside him—so splendidly, so unbelievably his. Hasil, quite unconscious of his criticism, sprang to her feet and shook the sand out of her dress.

"Just time for a swim before supper," she declared. "I'm longing to get to the heart of that topaz and emerald light. Coming?" Then, as he shook his head, she disappeared into one of the tiny huts, and a few minutes later ran past him into the sea. She seemed indeed, as she said, utterly happy. He might have bored her, frightened her or alienated her altogether, but she had taken their relationship for granted quite simply; and had enjoyed the novelty of their holiday together with the unspoilt enthusiasm of a child. Her attitude towards their relationship in itself augured well for the future, he reasoned. She was so young, so malleable, that he would only have to mould her according to his will—always taking care that he used his authority for the highest purpose. She had very grave faults, but that—poor child!—was in the main the result of environment. Watching her as she swam to land, breasting the waves with slow, strong strokes, Clement Dale prayed from his heart that he might be allowed to shape her for Divine ends—prayed, too, with the literalness of expression and total lack of humour common to reformers of all ages, that if in the interests of that same shaping it might be necessary not to spare the rod, his poor earthly love might not stay his hand and so spoil the child.

They were at Berneval, a little village nestling among

fields of barley and colza, seven or eight miles along the coast from Dieppe, and the days passed very peacefully away in a glory of blue and gold. In the morning they walked down the steep little gorge to the sea and bathed—in the afternoon they read or talked in the little garden of their pension or in an adjoining field—and after “five o’clock,” when the August sun had lost something of his power, they set out along the straight, poplar-bordered Normandy roads (which, as Hasil said, resembled wall-paper friezes much more than real roads) to find some other quaint little village drowsing in the evening glow. They were very good days, and Hasil really was as happy as she thought herself. After the maëlstrom of emotion through which she had lately passed, a natural reaction had set in, and for the time being she was content to suspend thought. It was very restful to be taken care of—not to have to arrange or decide anything, and very good, too, after her recent humiliation, to be with somebody for whom intellectual standards counted not at all. Though she was not as entirely acquiescent and unquestioning as Clement Dale believed, it was nevertheless quite true that she had shelved analysis of her feelings till later. The sickening fear that overcame her first when her husband approached her gave place so soon to a merging of her personality in his, that such analysis was difficult. He was better than she was—older and wiser generally; let him run things. One was so remote from reality, anyhow, in this quaint little corner of Normandy, that one expected everything to be different. She wrote no letters, even to Claudia. Clement wrote for them both to Castle Holme. It seemed years since her wedding day—she remembered nothing of it but the fragrance

of the carnations Claudia carried for bouquet in her rôle of bridesmaid, and the vignette of Miss Royston sniffing tearfully in a pew at the back.

Nothing outside Berneval seemed to matter very much; even when she realised two days after their arrival that it was her twenty-second birthday, her strongest feeling was one of surprise that a year ago she had been capable of experiencing so keenly. Only once during the six weeks they were away did anything occur to ruffle the peacefulness of their existence. They were chatting to the proprietor of the little Hôtel de la Plage, and he, speaking of people who had stayed there, pointed up to two windows above their heads, and said something about M. Jules Sebastien. Hasil, remembering at once that the brilliant genius had carried his broken life to Normandy, glanced at Clement, but he showed no sign of recognition, and as the opportunity was one not to be missed, she chattered away eagerly to the voluble little man, all smiles and gestures at the so charming intelligence of madame, whose French, although broken, was so much more melodious than that of most English ladies. (What a pity M. le Mari looked so stern! The pretty one was wasted on him. But your English curés were all alike, it was always *jour maigre* with them.)

And in reply to Hasil's questions he told her all he could of the unhappy man who had stayed at the hotel a night or two after his release, and had lived some time in Berneval itself. In the middle, Hasil, happening to glance at Clement, saw that he evidently disapproved of the conversation, and at once cut it short and bade M. Chose *au revoir*. They walked up the hill in silence, and then Clement asked coldly :

"Surely, Hasil, you don't mean the Sebastien who wrote those terribly profane poems?"

"Why, Clement!" Hasil exclaimed in wonder. "I thought everybody knew that Jules Sebastien was one of the finest artists of the nineteenth century."

Clement stopped short, and she saw suddenly that his face was pale and his eyes blazing.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said slowly, "that you, my wife, have been discussing that man with a hotel proprietor? Did you do it in ignorance, or do you know what sort of man he was?"

"Of course I know what sort of man he was," Hasil answered. "He was a very great genius who let his temperament ruin him. I should think very few people have realised beauty as he did, and that's what makes his fall so tragic." Then, in something like devilment, she added: "How professional of you to confuse a man's morality with his art!"

"Hasil," Clement answered, in a quieter voice than ever, "how dare you?"

Hasil went white in her turn.

"Dare?" she said. "I don't know what you mean, but it does occur to me that I have never been spoken to in my life as you have just spoken, and I'm afraid I strongly resent it."

But Clement had gained control of the situation—there always came a time when you had to put your foot down—in this case it had come a little earlier than usual, perhaps, but that must make no difference. He must be firm, but kind—*fortiter in re, suaviter in modo*.

"Dear," he said gently, "I am your husband, and you must respect my authority. I consider that a young girl has no business to concern herself with such things.

You did wrong in discussing Jules Sebastien with M. Chose just now, and I hope you will see it when you come to think it over quietly. In the meantime, I forbid you to mention his name again, or to read his books. I'm going in now to write a letter—won't you tell me when I come out again that you're going to obey me?" He kissed her tenderly and was gone.

Hasil, left alone in the golden sunshine, felt cold and shaken. Was fighting to begin so soon, just when she thought she had taken sanctuary? How unjust, how narrow of Clement! How everybody at Oxford would jeer if they could have witnessed the foregoing scene!

"He's not twentieth century at all," she said angrily, "he's a fanatic of the Dark Ages! . . ." But calmer thoughts succeeded presently. After all, it wasn't sheer tyranny—it was an effort on behalf of what seemed to him the right thing. He was so *good*—perhaps it really was unsuitable for her to have acted as she had done. She must remember that she was a clergyman's wife, and must walk more circumspectly. And it wasn't fair to be glad of a man to lean on and to arrange for you, if you didn't accept his authority in other things. It was not a month since she had promised in church to love, honour and obey him—and underneath the anger that had not quite died, she was conscious of a strange thrill of gladness that he had acted as he had—he was a man at any rate that you could respect, even when you did not agree with him. So that when Clement, coming out an hour later, put his arm round her and said softly :

"Well, sweetheart, which is it to be—peace or war?" she was finally disarmed, and replied at once :

"Of course it shall be as you wish, Clement dear.

I am so sorry it happened." Which only served to show the Reverend Clement Dale how right he had been in nipping the evil in the bud.

The incident was the only discord struck in what was otherwise six weeks of perfect harmony. In many respects Clement was a splendid companion. He swam well, loved being out of doors, would read or be read to with equal contentment (and it did not then strike Hasil that the books he had brought with him were singularly limited in range). He was a good Greek scholar, and she was never tired of hearing him read. Testament or Sophocles, it was one to her from an artistic point of view. She loved the way he gave each word its full value, pronouncing it as carefully as if he were chiselling little statuettes in precious stone, making of each a separate work of art.

"*Ἡ ἀγάπη οὐδέποτε ἐκπίπτει . . . πάντα στέγει, πάντα πιστεύει, πάντα ἐλπίζει, πάντα ὑπομένει . . .*" "Love faileth never," he would translate, "it believeth all things, it endureth all things." And she would listen, and be glad with all her heart that she was his wife.

About this time Claudia received the letter for which she had been anxiously waiting, and did not know what to make of the revelation it set forth of a completely different Hasil from the one she knew.

"I never knew life held such happiness [her friend had written]. It is so wonderful to feel that somebody else is stronger than you, and that you are guided and guarded in everything."

The sentence, with its decided reminiscence of the hymn-book, was so utterly unlike Hasil that Claudia

was tempted for a moment to wonder if Clement had dictated it. But the idea was absurd—it was just that Hasil was unconsciously adapting herself, chameleon-like, to her environment. She was happy at any rate—such an adaptability would have been impossible otherwise—and that was the great thing. It was strange, nevertheless.

Mr and Mrs Clement Dale, meanwhile, continued to be happy. After three weeks of Berneval they decided to move on, rather off than on the beaten track, and explore Normandy further. So they stayed first in a curious little pension in Maromme, a suburb of Rouen, where they never knew what they were eating, and where their room was little more than an attic cupboard—and they rode into Rouen every day in a tram crowded with noisy, blue-bloused *ouvriers*, who looked at them with scorn, and jostled them if possible. And they spent hours in the glorious old church of St Ouen, and hunted up the history of Joan of Arc, and went up by Funiculaire to quaint little Bon Secours on the hill above the Seine, where Clement presented Hasil with a rather terrible brooch, bearing a large presentment of La Pucelle, and about the size of a soup-plate. And they went to Jumièges and saw the ruins of the abbey, and to the old monastery of St Wandrille, not then the home of Maeterlinck—and Hasil wanted to buy a rosary, but Clement looked stern and forbade it. Best of all, they spent a few days in beautiful Caudebec, where the Seine flows languidly by, and the streets are picturesque, chiefly by reason of a mediævalism totally indifferent to hygienic progress. They bought fantastic pottery that was sometimes ugly, and were hard put to it to pack it all among the scanty

luggage they carried with them—and Hasil stole surreptitious glances at the boldly coloured pictures she saw brazenly displayed on the covers of paper-backed novels, and came to the conclusion that the French were a wonderful people, and wished that Clement were not so determined not to visit Paris. But they were, without any doubt, extremely happy, and knew that they were. On the whole, I think that Hasil was happier all through the time than Clement. She had not loved him so much to start with, and she was always finding new things to admire in him. He would take a child from the arms of some weary peasant woman in the train, and keep it on his knee contented and amused, while the mother snatched an hour or two of much-needed sleep—if it grew drowsy he would pillow its little lint-haired head on his shoulder as gently as a woman. And Hasil would look at him, and think what a good father he would make, and what a splendid fellow he was. Or he would get into conversation, in his funny stumbling French, with the waiter at some little café where they had stopped for *déjeuner*, and find out about the long hours, and the little crippled sister at home, and take care that his sympathy and encouragement were not expressed in words alone. Another trait she discovered in him was his love for animals. In Rouen he strode up to a hulking *cocher*, who was belabouring unmercifully the poor bag of skin and bones that dragged his *fiacre*, and blazed away at him in a volley of unintelligible expressions. But the set of his jaw and his clenched fists were perfectly comprehended, and the brute of a driver desisted. There was “P’tit Chou,” too—a half-starved little kitten, who followed them to their inn one wet night in

Jumièges, and was smuggled up to their room in the breast-pocket of Clement's coat. After a long debate it was decided that she should be permanently adopted, so she was given the name of "P'tit Chou" (a term of endearment which Hasil guaranteed as being indisputably and infallibly French), and thereafter accompanied them on their travels, and finally to Graydales.

They reached home in the middle of September, after a tedious all-day journey from Euston. It was an hour's drive from the station, and there was a drizzling rain. The country immediately around Graydales is less picturesque than in any other part of Cumberland, and till you remember that Wastwater is within walking distance your heart sinks. Graydales itself is a rather characterless little village, set down primly among flat fields—it has one street, with tidy little houses each side, and a local Whiteley at the corner, boasting two doors, one of which conducts you to the post office and the other to "General Stores," where you may obtain anything from Shem-el-Nessim to clogs. And the tidy little houses are so much alike that you feel the dwellers therein ought to put up blinds of a distinguishable colour in their windows, in case they forget where they live. The people are rather like their houses—the women silent creatures, with high cheekbones and lustreless hair scraped back into a lump like a farthing bun at the back of their heads—the men almost equally taciturn, keenly resentful of any new thing. (Their attitude to a new-comer may be summed up in that historic sentence: "'Ere's a strynger, Bill—'eave 'arf a brick at 'im.") But it would be hard to find a thriftier people—you never come across a dirty or uncared-for child in Graydales, and you could see your

face in the linoleum which runs in every one of those little houses from the front door to the back kitchen (and is generally the same pattern, by the way—for why should Crosthwaite stock more than one design, he would like to know?). There are two cliques—the professional clique, which includes such people as the doctor, the lawyer and the headmaster of the fairly important grammar school there, and the other clique, including all those who have not been adjudged worthy of entrée into the upper heaven. The Vicar is quite outside these two sets, and has to be on friendly terms with them both, preserving some sort of an *entente cordiale* between them. And, as if to symbolise this aloofness, the Vicarage stands two good Cumberland miles outside the village, and more than one from the church, along what some people declare to be the worst road in the United Kingdom.

CHAPTER XXII

To her dying day Hasil remembered the "gooseflesh" sensation that assailed her when she stepped inside her future home. It was nearly seven, but there was no light anywhere, and nothing suggestive of a welcome. She pushed open the first door on the right of the narrow little passage, and sat down wearily, while Clement saw to the unloading of the luggage. In a minute the woman who had opened the door entered.

"Was there anything you'd be wanting, Mrs Dale?" she asked stiffly. "Mr Dale didn't say anything, so I didn't get anything in."

"Well, I expect we shall want a meal presently," Hasil answered. "We've been travelling all day and had nothing but a few sandwiches."

Her head was aching, and she wished the woman would go. Yet when the door closed behind her she was conscious of a great sense of loneliness—homesickness, almost.

How silly!—since this was her home, and she was with the person nearest to her in the world. Judging by the bumping overhead and the heavy footsteps on the stairs, they were carrying up the luggage—she would go to bed early. In the meantime she examined critically the room in which she was sitting. No attempt of hers to see everything that was Clement's *couleur de rose* could disguise the fact that it was rather exceptionally hideous. The walls were washed in that

shade of green which is a sickly yellow in any but the brightest sunlight—on the floor was a brown drugget carpet, and in the centre stood a long table covered with a "tapestry" tablecover in greens and yellows, and bordered with a fringe consisting of alternate green and yellow tassels. Though it was only the middle of September the empty grate looked miserably cheerless, and there was not a comfortable chair in the room. On each side of the fireplace stood shelves holding books with titles that were uninviting—"A Pastor's Testimony," Milman's "History of the Jews," several volumes of *The Sunday at Home*, and bound *Quivers*. On her right was what she was thereafter to hear reference to as "the shivoneer," which evidently displayed Clement's stock of silver and electro-plate—a Georgian teapot, an undesirably elaborate cake-dish, a cruets stand. Opposite her a heavy roll-top desk, at present locked, completed the furniture. And the pictures were no better—on one side two German prints, representing scenes from Shakespeare (*Othello* relating his exploits to Desdemona, and the play-scene from *Hamlet*), on the other the portrait of a certain Rev. Dr Horncastle, godly but unhandsome, and a coloured print of Innocence clasping two doves to her breast. Altogether a depressing room, whose bareness spoke not only of poverty of pocket, but of poverty of taste.

When, after an unappetising egg-and-tea meal, Clement suggested that she should see the rest of the house, she found nothing that cheered her flagging spirits. Clement's tiny study was better than the parlour, owning as it did a few good pictures and books, and wearing a look of being loved and used—but then the "drawing-room" was worse, in that it aimed

higher and achieved less. The drawing-room at Mallacombe Vicarage had been charming, with an atmosphere of comfort and refinement—still, perhaps it was not fair to judge while the sofa and chairs were in holland covers; she would try not to let her impressions be too definite till the morning—the nicest house would look horrible on such an evening as this. But she did not think that morning light would redeem their bedroom, with its heavy crochet quilt and toilet-table cover, and its dreadfully aggressive texts. The wall-paper, the china, the linoleum which served for carpet, were worse than she could have dreamed; she hated it all, from the pink frilly gas globe to the patchwork rug beside the bed.

She was a little comforted when Clement told her that he had been so busy since he came that the house was pretty much as his predecessor had left it, except for the intervention of Mrs Owen, the sour-faced lady who had opened the door, and who, with the aid of a little girl who came in daily, “did for” him. But instinct told her that Clement thought that the texts and other horrors like them were as they should be, and that she would be powerless against either him or Mrs Owen. She was so abysmally ignorant of the sort of knowledge that would impress Mrs Owen! She knew nothing of cooking or sewing or housekeeping generally—yet it would be necessary to simulate knowledge if she were to keep Mrs Owen in her proper place. But how simulate a knowledge that the boot-button eyes of Mrs Owen would not instantly discover to be counterfeit? Why, oh, why had she not profited by Aunt Selina, who was as house-proud as you could wish, and a match for many Mrs Owens?

As she fell asleep that night her last conscious

thought was that she would gladly barter all the garnering of those three precious Oxford years for the smallest hint that would arm her against the Mrs Owens of this world. She had never really thought of what her life at Graydales would consist; she had not the gift of seeing things in detail, nor for seeing them in the light of commonplace reality. With her conditions of life were either glorious or abominable; she was sensitive to the tragic or the comic in her existence, she never succeeded in dealing with it as an ordinary everyday affair, neither tragic nor comic, but simply occurring. In looking forward to the life with Clement, she had realised that their characters were not alike, and that she was by no means suited by nature for a clergyman's wife—but she had never made real to herself any idea of what her days would be like, and how she would spend them. Where was the exaltation of spirit that she had experienced during their honeymoon, or even in the train the day she left Oxford? She had told herself then that outside conditions mattered not at all—what you yourself were and thought, that was the essential thing. If the Dweller in the Innermost were serene, Mrs Owen and her kind might work their worst. It had seemed so possible that day, so possible in Normandy—she remembered that she had felt quite eager to begin. Well, things could not be as bad as they seemed—if Clement held firm about the texts, there were her books and pictures to unpack, and any amount to be done in the house. . . .

She woke to the bracing remembrance that she was only three miles from the sea, and had her bicycle. She must ask Clement how to get there, and make the most of her time before the winter. From her window, as she

was dressing, she could see the dim outline of the crags that stood sentinel round Wastwater, like a guard of honour round a dead king, and thought that it was said: "The mountains also shall bring peace." Very soon she would go there, and meantime, knowing it was so near, one need not feel so "cabined, cribbed, confined." The garden was an atonement too—it was large for the size of the house, and the lawn was shaded at one end by some beautiful Lebanon cedars. There were asters and dahlias still making it bright with colour, and a purple clematis climbed over the trellis outside the door leading to the garden. She would sit there often to read and think and write. . . .

Clement read prayers before breakfast to herself and Mrs Owen (who, like their bedroom, owed no debt of gratitude to the autumn sunlight), and she admired the beauty of his profile and the air of authority he wore.

The meal was a pleasant one, but very soon Clement said grace and rose, declaring that he must begin work as soon as possible.

"Oh, Clement," cried Hasil in dismay, "but we've only been a quarter of an hour at breakfast!"

"But, dearest, I've eaten all I want to—haven't you?"

"Yes; but I haven't talked all I want to," Hasil pouted, "and I think half-an-hour is the minimum of time it is decent to spend over a meal."

He smiled—the smile of an indulgent parent at a lovable but unreasonable child.

"Well, I think it is silly to spend longer over eating than eating takes you. Anyhow, the real point is that I've a great deal of work to do after my holiday, and must set about it at once. I'm going to my study till

lunch-time—you'll see I'm not disturbed unless it's really important, Hasil dear, won't you?"

She wandered rather disconsolately round the garden till nine o'clock struck, and then determined that it was time to begin proceedings with Mrs Owen. She pushed open the kitchen door and was disconcerted to find the lady in question still engaged with the remains of a substantial meal. It seemed cowardice to retreat, so she advanced into the room, thus opening the campaign with an initial mistake.

"Breakfast was quite nice, Mrs Owen," she observed, "but I think scrambled eggs are nicer with a little more milk. Oh yes—and will you please make me a little toast for meals? I eat very little bread."

"Expect that's why you look so weedy," Mrs Owen said tartly. "And I've no time for toast of a morning. It's as much as I can do to get breakfast ready at all, with Mr Dale cutting off the quarter just before it for prayers, and that Hilda no more good than a carved image, if as much. If you come down in good time you'll find the toasting fork here—more I can't say."

Hasil flushed scarlet, but decided to let the matter rest till she had consulted Clement, and went on to give orders for the day. She was ruthlessly cut short in the middle, however.

"Don't you think you'd better leave all that to me, m'm?" Mrs Owen asked—"seeing I've looked after Mr Dale since he came here, and you don't seem to know a cabbage from a swede."

"That may be, Mrs Owen," Hasil replied quietly, "but I happen to be mistress here, and though I shall be very glad of your help in housekeeping matters, I don't think you must forget that. . . . I noticed the

silver on the sideboard is a very bad colour—it had better be cleaned to-day.” And she left the kitchen with her head high. A glorious sense of exultation was tingling in her veins.

“ I *downed* her,” she said gleefully to herself. “ I didn’t think of it hours afterwards in bed—then and there I *downed* her ! ” She went upstairs, and was happy for a couple of hours unpacking her possessions. She was standing on a chair hanging her beloved Botticelli where she could see it as she lay in bed, when the door opened and Mrs Owen’s grim visage appeared round it.

“ Thought you said the silver had better be cleaned ? ” she queried tersely. She was, as far as Hasil could judge, of pure Cockney extraction—a fact she sought to disguise. She had an irritating way of going back over a sentence to recover a lost aspirate, and she never by any chance used the first person singular at the beginning of a remark.

“ Yes, I did,” Hasil answered. “ What about it ? ”

“ Well, aren’t you coming to help, is what I want to know ? ”

“ No, I’m not,” said Hasil. “ I haven’t unpacked my things yet, and there is very little silver really, I’m sure you and Hilda can manage between you.”

Mrs Owen’s reply was to slam the door expressively.

“ It’s all very well,” Hasil thought to herself, “ but we can’t go on like this. There’s a battle over every tiny thing, and some day soon *I* shall be *downed*.” She looked at her watch. It was almost half-past eleven. She went down to the kitchen and rummaged in the larder and found some very dry biscuits. Putting them on a tray with a glass of milk, she carried them upstairs

to Clement's study, childishly pleased at the thought of the little surprise in store for him. He would tell her she shouldn't have troubled—it was like her sweet little self to bother about him, and he would kiss her. But unfortunately for her castle building, the Reverend Clement signally failed to rise to the occasion. He only looked up as she came in, permitted himself the slightest frown, and said :

“Thank you so much, darling, but I make it a rule to eat nothing between meals.”

“Oh,” said Hasil, “I didn't know. By the way, would you please say something that will put that intolerable woman downstairs in her place? I can't do with her as she is.”

“It's only a matter of tact, I think. She wants understanding. I'll see what I can do later on, but I'm afraid I mustn't stop any longer now.” He turned to his work again. Hasil went to her room, shut the door behind her, and swore deliberately.

“Damn this frightful house, *damn* Clement's priggishness, but, above and beyond all, DAMN Mrs Owen,” she said softly.

Lunch was half-an-hour late, and Hasil requested Clement to tell Mrs Owen himself that she must be more punctual.

“Well, what did she say?” she inquired eagerly, when he came out to her in the garden a few minutes later.

“She said you had told her the silver was to be cleaned, and as you didn't give any help yourself, she didn't see how she was to do three people's work and still be in time with the dinner.”

“But I never told her it was to be cleaned by dinner-time,” exclaimed Hasil angrily. “She's got nothing

on earth to do between dinner and tea—why couldn't she have waited? It's sheer cussedness, and if you uphold her in it she'll be impossible to deal with, and I for one sha'n't attempt to." Clement wore the ineffective look of a man who finds himself between two angry women.

"Hasil, dear, what do you mean? How can you say I uphold her? I only wanted to keep her satisfied for your sake, because it isn't easy to get servants up here. But I must be off now—I've got all my parishioners to see." He tramped off in the afternoon sunshine, whistling as he went. Every house he entered welcomed him. He was nowhere more truly and valuably himself than on his professional rounds. In his relations with Hasil, as in all things not definitely clerical, he was uncertain of himself, and proportionately a failure, but in every aspect of his work as a clergyman he was emphatically successful. He knew exactly what to say to Mrs Crosthwaite, wife of the most important shopkeeper in Graydales, but he was just as careful to deal tactfully with old Gibson, who was generally drunk and had a civil word for nobody but the parson. On this particular afternoon he accepted tea from Mrs Crosthwaite, old Gibson and half-a-dozen others who pressed it on him—it would never do to make invidious distinctions. The cold air exhilarated him, and the thought that these people of his loved him and were the happier for his visit, gladdened him unspeakably. It was nearly dark when he lifted the latch of the Vicarage gate, but there was no light in the parlour and no fire—although the table was laid for tea.

"Hasil," he called, "where are you, dear? Come

along—I'm back at last and good for another tea, if it's with you ! ”

A tear-stained, rather dishevelled Hasil met him on the threshold.

“ Did David or whoever it was mean he was dying of boredom when he said : ‘ *A day in thy courts is as a thousand years* ’ ? ” she asked him. “ This day has been a thousand years long, and every minute of it damnable ! ”

There was a pathetic little catch in her voice that should have disarmed him, but he thought he had a duty to perform.

“ Hasil ! ” he exclaimed sternly, “ what are you thinking of ? What sort of example are you setting when you allow yourself to use language like that ? You knew what you were doing, surely, when you said you would marry me—did you think marriage would be nothing but a continuous honeymoon ? If so, you were very seriously mistaken, and it is a pity you didn't find it out sooner. ”

It was the Clement of the Jules Sebastien episode, and for a moment she was too much taken aback to reply. In that moment he turned to go upstairs, saying only : “ Let me know when supper is ready. ” But she caught his sleeve.

“ Clement, Clement, you mustn't go like that ! I'm sorry if I vexed you, but I've been so lonely to-day, and it's my first day in our home. ”

“ But, dearest, why didn't you go out for a walk ? You're so fond of walking, and it would have done you any amount of good. ”

“ How could I go by myself ? I don't know my way anywhere, and you just went out without a word. ” The

chronicler grieves to have to relate that at this juncture Hasil laid her face against the breast-pocket of her husband's Burberry and wept. His sheer love for her got the better of his care for her soul—and, drawing her into the parlour, he took her on his knee and comforted her.

"You could have come with me, you know, sweetheart," he said tenderly. "They would have been so glad to see you."

"But I *couldn't* guess you wanted me, Clement. All through lunch you never even hinted at it. I don't expect anything but that you'll have to work hard, but I must do something too. I'm neither useful nor ornamental so far."

"There was the silver," he suggested fatuously.

"There was the silver," said Hasil, "which it was fitting that Mrs Owen, and nobody but Mrs Owen, should clean. Clement, does a man *have* to be a fool if he's good? I do pray not."

"But I don't understand," said Clement.

"It's just as well, my dear. Now come and have some tea, even if you don't really want any, because I'm simply starving, and afterwards we'll light the candles in the drawing-room, and you shall sing."

He could not bear to refuse her, but he was uncomfortably conscious of work to be done.

"Don't look as if you're going to refuse, Clement, or I shall do something desperate! Your work can wait till to-morrow for once."

"To-morrow is Saturday, dear, and I shall want it for my sermon," he said. "You mustn't forget we've had six weeks' holiday, and I've got to get back into harness now." But when they had finished tea he sang

some of the songs Hasil loved, and for the first time that day she experienced something like happiness. Like Adrian Harding, he played for himself, but unlike Adrian Harding, there was something restrained and reserved about his singing.

"You're no good at love songs, Clement," she said, as he concluded a rather wooden rendering of a Schumann lyric. "You can't forget that they encourage us to indulge our emotions. Sing something that you have no scruples about—'sacred,' if you like, but it must be music."

He looked at her a little sadly, and struck the opening chords of Schubert's beautiful Litany—"Take your rest, ye peaceful-hearted. . . ."

Yes, that was it—he was peaceful-hearted, he could not know the storms that shook her whole being—he would never understand. He thought and would go on thinking that she had not "found Christ," and that when that wonderful experience came to her, she too would be contented and happy. He was very good and very much to be admired, and she loved him dearly, but his God could never be hers. She was not even sure accept the pale, crucified Saint that Clement worshipped—hers must be a God of gladness and of out-of-doors, of beauty in the sunshine and in the starlight, and babies. Clement thought it wrong to worship all those things—he thought God made them, but she knew that God *was* them, and they were God.

CHAPTER XXIII

AND as the days passed it all seemed to become more, not less, difficult. Her temperament was of the type which is at its best in crises—her spirit could rise to an emergency, it could not issue triumphant from a conflict with everyday monotony. She tried to spur herself to new effort sometimes, to remember Oxford with her feet in the slums and her beautiful head reared to the sky, but she soon flagged. It could not be said that, parochially speaking, Mrs Clement Dale was a success. For most of the work she was totally unfitted, and even where she could have found it congenial, her morbid self-consciousness militated against her. For instance, Clement had started a sort of impromptu crèche in the parish room, where mothers might leave their babies during their day's work in the care of a sensible, experienced woman. Hasil did not take to Miss Yates from the first, and for a long time refused to go near the crèche, in spite of her passionate love of babies.

One wet morning, however, Mrs Owen had surpassed herself, and, tired of everything, Hasil felt a yearning for just the sight and sound of those wee scraps of humanity. She put on her mackintosh and hurried through the rain to the parish room. Miss Yates was nowhere to be seen, and one poor mite was wailing dismally, beating the air with its tiny fists and drawing up its knees. Hasil snatched it from the

battered iron cot, and held it to her breast. The warmth of its body stirred the mother-love which is the dominant characteristic of an Indian woman of whatever race, and kissing it hungrily, she crooned to it some quaint little melody with a haunting refrain that seemed to come into her mind unbidden. Lulled and comforted, the baby fell asleep in her arms, and Hasil sat on in the cheerless room, dreaming dreams. If she and Clement could have a child there would be something to live for—the days would not hang so heavily, and she would feel that somebody really needed her. Now there was Clement of course, but she was by no means sure that Clement needed her. He loved her dearly, but he did seem at times to regard her rather more in the light of a temptation than as a helpmate. Besides, he loved his work and was always very busy. She sometimes thought she could have helped him with his sermons, but that would have meant contradicting most of what he had said. . . . At this stage in her thinking, Miss Yates bustled back with the milk she had been to fetch, and disturbed her reverie. The noise of her entering woke up the baby, who began to cry feebly.

“Why, goodness me, Mrs Dale,” she exclaimed, “that baby’s got wind! Just lay it face downwards on your lap and pat it gently—you’re squeezing it too tight. And fancy holding a baby on your *right* arm—you haven’t had much to do with them, have you now?”

Hasil got up abruptly, and put the baby back in the cot.

“I’m afraid I must be going,” she said curtly, “I didn’t know it was so late.” And, absolutely certain that Miss Yates thought her quite devoid of any

capacity for looking after babies, she turned a deaf ear in future to the promptings of her heart, and the crèche saw her no more.

She was unfitted by nature for successful dealings with women—she was too nervous of herself, and not able to forget what they would probably be thinking of her. The fact that she knew nothing of sewing made her shy of the mothers' meetings at the start. True, Miss Yates was there to give any technical help that might be needed, but poor Hasil felt that the scornful eyes of twenty or so mothers were fixed on her from time to time, and that twenty or so hearts said within themselves: "A vicar's wife, and doesn't know how to featherstitch!"

Another woman under these circumstances, finding herself ignorant of that which it was important she should know, would soon have mastered the little that goes to make up plain sewing, stung by her pride into unusual ability. But for the Oriental temperament the thing is not possible. Probably no one suffers more keenly from ridicule than an Asiatic—yet he has never completely learnt how to turn their own weapon against his torturers. So Hasil remained unskilled in featherstitching and herringboning and putting in gussets, and suffered agonies at the hands of the unsuspecting mothers. It had been arranged that she should read to them, and the choice had been left to her. She was still fresh enough from Oxford to feel that the world was waiting to be reformed in matters of taste. She was still filled, like Shelley, with a passion for reforming. Miss Yates had suggested Edna Lyall's "Donovan" as eminently suitable, from the point of view of interest and morality, but Hasil set it aside.

"Let me read them something *great*," she said, "something that will add beauty to their lives."

Miss Yates sighed, but withdrew, and Hasil read "Paradise Lost" at the first meeting. The mothers yawned as openly as they dared, and finally conversed in what they considered inaudible whispers. Miss Yates suggested afterwards, without triumph, that a taste, to be appreciative, must be either educated or instinctive. Hasil shed secret tears of bitterness, and brought "Donovan" to the second meeting.

There was nobody in Graydales who seemed to be in the least congenial. Clement had told her at the beginning that she must not expect to find the inhabitants abreast of the times, but she was not prepared for the solid wall of prejudice that blocked their outlook. She could find nothing to like in them, being herself too undeveloped and too seriously affected by them to regard them philosophically and bring her sense of humour to bear. She raged against them futilely—sometimes in private, sometimes in public.

On one terrible occasion a Mrs Paterson, wife of the local practitioner, had called. She was of the overbearing type of woman, it must be confessed, ruling her husband and family of sons with a rod of iron, and accustomed to laying down the law without dispute. She was a splendid housekeeper, and had not yet met the woman she was unable to "floor" on domestic topics in the course of a quarter of an hour's rigid cross-questioning. Hasil cordially detested her—in that the lady had hopelessly worsted her on the subject of jam-making at their first encounter—and she had not done anything to further the conversation on this particular afternoon.

"You're not looking over well, Mrs Dale," said Mrs Paterson at length, "what is the matter?"

"Nothing that I know of," Hasil replied shortly. "I had a cold a week or so ago, and perhaps I still show signs of it."

Mrs Paterson looked waggish. "I think I know these colds. You can confide in me, my dear, you know—I'm the mother of six."

"I'm afraid I don't quite see what that's got to do with it," said Hasil. "If you want to know whether I'm going to have a baby, I'm not, as far as I know at present."

"Well, then, I hope it won't be long, Mrs Dale, before you do. We need a good example set us here. Look at those young Lodewoods! Been married four years, and nothing to show for it—scandalous, I call it."

"I don't know what you mean. How do you know, anyway, that they would have them? And if they would, they're frightfully badly off, and I think it would be 'scandalous' of them to have babies they couldn't provide for."

"And you a clergyman's wife, Mrs Dale!" Mrs Paterson collected her umbrella and handbag. "It has always been my experience that if people do their best, the Lord provides."

"I'm very glad you can say so, Mrs Paterson—it hasn't been mine. Look at the misery that goes on in clergymen's families where there are hundreds and thousands of children, and not enough to eat even, sometimes." Hasil thought of the Royston menage, with its pervading atmosphere of shabbiness and self-sacrifice.

"It seems to me, Mrs Dale, that you have a very

uncontrolled manner of talking. Hundreds and thousands of children, indeed! May I ask if your husband shares your views and encourages them?"

"Clement and I haven't even discussed the subject," said Hasil, flushing. "But he probably *would* believe that a large family and no money is a sign of God's blessing." Her nerves were on edge—why didn't the woman go? Wasn't it bad enough to spend your life in this sort of atmosphere without having to discuss things with Mrs Paterson? But a few minutes later the lady rose, sternly declining tea, and taking a very frigid leave. Meeting Clement, for whom she had a genuine liking, in the village, she conceived it to be her duty to lay the matter before him.

"Your wife is young, you know, Mr Dale," she concluded not unkindly, "and we should none of us like to stand or fall by the opinions we held at her age. But as the wife of the man whose example is to help us to do our duty, I don't think she is as free to air her views as she seems to imagine. Perhaps you could explain it to her better than I can—I've not enough patience with young people. And I hope you'll soon have a little one of your own to put everything right."

"I'm much obliged to you for speaking, Mrs Paterson," Clement said. "My wife is young, as you say, and doesn't quite understand."

And when he arrived home he spoke more sternly than he had ever done to Hasil.

"You don't seem to realise that you have any duty to me," he said. "How can I have any influence with the people if you, my wife, openly express these revolutionary and unchristian ideas? I am very much displeased with you."

Hasil raised her eyebrows. "But, my dear Clement, it isn't a question of being displeased! I'm of 'riper years,' and I've a perfect right to my opinion. I firmly believe every word I said to Mrs Paterson, and I wish you thought so too. You'll talk of punishing me next!"

"I wish I could think of some corrective, certainly," he said, with utter gravity. "As I can't, I can only forbid you to say anything of the sort again. And what hurts me most, Hasil, is that you could talk so wrongly of such a sacred thing—don't you want a child of ours? Do you know I pray for one every day of my life?"

"But so do I, Clement! Oh, it's no use, you'll never understand! Why ever did you marry me? I wasn't any different then—you knew what you wanted, I didn't—but I told you I shouldn't be the right person all the time." And the episode ended in the usual torrent of tears, and Clement's kisses and petting—the usual pledge of better things to come, and the mutual belief that in future things really *would* be different.

Clement at this time spent many hours on the welfare of his wife's soul. He believed that she was thoroughly undisciplined, and that with infinite care and patience she might be brought into the right path. He did not understand that fundamentally her way of thought was as different from his as his own from Judaism or Rome. He could not see that if her character was immature, her intelligence was not. For the time, however, his authority over her held good—she was still generally awed by his displeasure, and never beyond the consolation of his kisses. His anger was a reality to her, but its potency lay in the fact that he

was her husband. She was under the spell of her senses—Clement pleased her to look upon, and his authoritative bearing thrilled and dominated her because she had not realised how flimsy, as far as she was concerned, were the foundations upon which that same authority was built. Her relations with him, whether in love or anger, were the sole excitement of her days—and presently, when the ordinary monotonous routine became intolerable, she would be tempted into “scenes” with him for the sake of the knowledge that when his anger was past (and she never loved him better than when he was angry) there would be the pleasant sensation of reconciliation and renewed passion. Poor Clement experienced nothing of the sort, and his wife’s vagaries were a constant unhappiness to him. He was conscious that she was different from other women, but he could not use this as an argument for her improvement, because she despised them all so much. The colour-sense in her, starved in the bleakness of the people of Graydales, suddenly flamed out, to the consternation of Clement and the parish generally. She took to dressing in daring colours, and wearing audacious hats, and Clement, woefully conscious of his ignorance of such matters, kept silence, till Mrs Paterson again interfered. Hasil never knew what she said, but Clement told her one day that some of the people in the village had remarked on her style of dress, and that Mrs Paterson had “happened to say” that it wasn’t good taste to wear pearls in the morning.

“They may be quite wrong,” he said quietly, “and I am sure you think they are; but I think in your position it is better to avoid being conspicuous.”

Then, in sheer childish pique, she adopted perpetual

browns and greys, which were most unbecoming to her olive skin, and again Clement felt himself powerless to remonstrate, having lodged his original grievance.

And in the middle of it all, Mrs Owen gave notice. She declared that Mrs Dale did next to nothing in the house herself, and was for ever finding fault with the work other people did. "Can't see no reason for standing it," she wound up her long peroration to a weary Clement. "It's my belief that you've got your work cut out with the missis, and no knowing if you're going to make anything of it at the end."

It was impossible to replace her in the village, and very difficult to persuade a native of any other place that Graydales possessed superior advantages—so they declined upon Hilda, a nervous and ungainly damsel with hands and feet of phenomenal size, and boots with a perpetual squeak. There followed a period when the world seemed to consist of leathery bacon, underdone meat and overdone potatoes. Hasil knew nothing of cooking, and had the typical Eurasian inability to concentrate on an apparently irksome or tedious task. Clement was not a man to whom food mattered very much, but neither was he a very strong man, and when his constitution began to suffer, so did his temper, and so in exact proportion did Hasil.

She was utterly without resource at this time. Now and again she would map out a scheme of work for herself, and determine to read steadily for two or three hours a day, but with no incentive, her enthusiasm soon failed. She would wander aimlessly from room to room, taking up a book here and altering a vase there, or try a few notes on the piano. Clement would have been delighted if she would have learnt his accompaniments,

but she could not apply herself to the drudgery of practising the same notes over and over again. On the other hand, as has been said, she would gladly have helped him with his sermons. He was not an inspiring preacher, but his thoughts were always simple and vigorous, and it seemed to her that they would gain so much more in effect if the prose in which they were worded were more beautiful. But Clement distrusted beauty in prose as much as in any other element of life—if the thought were good in itself it needed no adornment.

And she was bound to admit, when she had lived six months among his parishioners, that they were not likely to be impressed by sheer beauty either.

On days when she felt more than usually energetic, she would walk down to the sea, a distance of about three miles. The Cumberland coast is wild and bleak at this spot, and in winter the waves swarm angrily round the curving beach like a hungry rabble round an aristocrat's palace, thundering to be let in. It is a death-dealing coast, and the sea-line is nearly always fringed with the flotsam and jetsam of cargo boats fated never to reach their destination. Hasil would often amuse herself with hunting for treasures among the sodden oranges and lemons, the empty bottles and old casks, weaving tales round what she found. Her isolation made her morbid and introspective—she would tell herself that she, like the bruised fruit on the shore, had come from a land of sunshine and colour to be dashed against the rocks of the bleak, uncomprehending north.

The mountains had no message for her. They do not speak to you unless your spirit braces itself to hear

them—they have nothing for the supine and introspective mood. And in the winter the mountains round Graydales show only their sterner aspect. In the spring they are less frightening, so that the little sun-shot clouds play round them quite happily, flying in rainbow companies from peak to peak, but till then they stand like a solemn assembly of the old gods, convened for some high purpose, with no comfort for lesser people. . . .

Very soon it was dark at four, and then there were six long hours to be endured somehow. Clement generally came in to tea, but as often as not he went out again afterwards, either to read the evening service (to a congregation of three at most) or to visit somebody in trouble. And when he was in they were not often happy together.

CHAPTER XXIV

MRS HARDING sat at her writing-table one morning in the following April. The soft spring air blew in through the open window, bringing with it a vital, indefinable smell of the earth. The little clouds were racing across the blue sky in a terrible hurry, like children let out of school—short-stalked daffodils of a pale gold colour nodded in the paddock beyond, and in the low-lying fields behind there were masses of white violets. For the last few weeks the woods had been full of primroses, and the silky tufts of the palm-willow were swelling with life. Everything spoke of youth and vigour, but it seemed to Mrs Harding that that was just what made effort of any sort so difficult. These warm, soft days seemed to sap her strength as the cold winter had not done—she was weary in body and soul. Her disease had gained on her perceptibly since the autumn. She was weaker and thinner : her eyes seemed too large for her face, and her wedding ring had slipped off her hand only yesterday, and rolled under the piano. She had had some difficulty in finding it. Was it a symbol of the loosing of the hateful fetters she had worn so long, she wondered. She was engaged in sorting and destroying piles of old letters that she had allowed to accumulate, and dozens of old dance programmes, whose pencils had long since been utilised, lay before her, crumpled and discoloured. But her eyes had strayed out through the window, and her thoughts,

vagrant with the waywardness of a sick woman's fancy, were back in her girlhood.

She saw herself a tall, dark-eyed girl of eighteen, passionately in love with life, accepting all the good that came her way as hers by divine right. She remembered the exultant tiredness of her after a long day with the hounds, or a night of dancing, and there flashed across her mind the memory of a day up by the dew-pond near Chanctonbury Ring, when she had flung herself down on the grass, pressing her young body against the earth till it hurt her, in a sudden longing to be as close as possible to the great life-giver. Everything was a keen delight—from her cold bath in the morning to the soft velvet of her horse's nose, as he rubbed against her cheek in an eloquent appeal for sugar.

There were troubles of a sort in her home. Sir Ralph Faulkner, her father, came of a very good yeoman stock, who had been on the land goodness knows how long. Somewhere in the eighteenth century a Faulkner was rewarded with the title for some obscure service to his king, and since then they had settled down contentedly, secure in the knowledge that once and for all they were "county."

But investments were so confoundedly bad, and the estate swallowed so much money every year, that Sir Ralph found it very hard at times to make both ends meet in a sufficiently obvious way. The staff of servants was inconspicuously reduced, Lady Faulkner and Gwynneth giving up their maid, and two gardeners being sacrificed; but Sir Ralph insisted on the house in Pont Street every autumn, and the household was obliged to resort surreptitiously to little petty economies.

Many a cottage went unroofed and many tiny charities were cut down to support that house in Pont Street, and the artificiality of it all was the first bitter thing in Gwynneth Faulkner's life. Lady Faulkner often looked careworn and a little haggard, and Gwynneth was as jealous of her mother's beauty as if it had been her own.

Looking back over the years, it seemed to her that her story at every point lacked none of the elements of *The Family Herald* romances she discovered at the age of ten under her nurse's mattress, and forthwith perused. It was when she was eighteen that her friendship with Jack Hunt began. He was the Rector's only son, and though she had known him all her life, he dawned upon her as an entirely new person in the long vacation of his second year at Oxford. The Hunts had no particularly good blood in them, or were ignorant of the fact if they had, but Jack Hunt was an extraordinarily picturesque person, with the dark hair, tragic eyes and aquiline nose that her generation found so irresistible. He on his side recognised in her the maiden purity of his ideal. They met a good deal, at first by accident at tennis and local garden-parties, and soon, by design, out on the Sussex Downs. He read to her, and expounded Rousseau and the brotherhood of man—and her soul caught fire from his. The world was no longer merely a place of out-of-doors, for he made her see the unjust conditions under which men labour, and the suffering of children and women. They read Shelley together in the wonderful summer days on the Downs, and wondered why it was that nobody but he and they two had had such ideas before. And it was all very idyllic till Sir Ralph called Gwynneth into his "den"

one morning, and asked her how much longer she intended making a fool of herself over young Hunt.

"He hasn't got a single penny to bless himself with," he concluded angrily, "has he now?"

"I don't know," said Gwynneth simply, "I never asked him."

Her father explained to her in a few well-chosen phrases that Jack Hunt had neither money nor livelihood. "You can't grow fat spouting socialist platitudes in Hyde Park, you know, my dear!"

She left him, understanding that it was her filial duty to retrieve the fallen fortunes of the house of Faulkner by a satisfactory marriage.

Enter, with *Family Herald* promptitude, the rival suitor, in the shape of Adrian Harding, owner of an estate and family name in Surrey, not many miles from the Faulkners as the crow flies. He saw in Gwynneth a healthy mother for the sons for whom he hoped, and wanted her badly enough to be prepared to come to the rescue of her relations, if that were the price of her. She had a sensation that she was being chloroformed and forced into a course of action against her will. Even when Jack Hunt insisted on seeing her, she felt powerless to alter things. It was destiny, and since destiny broke all men on the wheel sooner or later, why should she hope to escape?

"You see, there's no way out, Jack," she said dully, when he had asked her for the hundredth time why she was doing it. "If it weren't Adrian Harding, it would be someone else, perhaps older, perhaps worse. Marriage is the only career I've been educated for, and I've no more right to stay in a home where my parents can't afford to keep me than any other girl who can earn her

own living. Earning one's living because one's got to is always hateful, I should think. I love you, Jack, and you know it—you are the only man who will ever matter to me—you are my real husband."

"Do you mean that?" he had said, and the look in his eyes had turned her sick with terror. But she had replied that she did, and there on the great Downs they took hands and plighted their troth.

She was then the affianced wife of Adrian Harding, and six months later, with due accompaniment of village bells and village choirboys and flowers strewn by village school children, she married him. The first time he had proposed to her and she had curtly refused him, she had foreseen somehow that this would be the inevitable end, and it was with a feeling that was almost relief that she realised that the event that had been hanging over her for so long was upon her at last.

He was not an unkind husband. He wanted two things of her—that she should bear him sons and that she should entertain for him. He was more than twenty years her senior, and treated her as a child to be generally petted and humoured. He laughed at her ideas and dismissed them as youthful fancies—in all the thirty-five years she had lived with him he had never discussed anything with her on equal terms. And as that was the price of peace, she acquiesced.

And then, when they had been married eighteen months, Jack Hunt came back. Nobody but herself knew of his return—he had asked her for one good-bye interview before he left to take up a Government appointment at Gadaref in the Sudan. She remembered that evening in the orchard as if it were yesterday, when her whole nature had opened into flower, as it

were, in the passionate bliss of loving and being loved. Even now she clung to the memory as the one possession wholly joyous that her life had held. It had brought her years of suffering and anxiety, but she had never for a single instant regretted it. She had not allowed her sin to hurt anybody but herself; she had wrestled with all the selfish instincts in her nature for months to keep the secret from her husband. She knew that to tell him would have meant freedom, and then she and Jack could have starved in happiness somewhere in the Sudan. But it would have wrecked his life and brought shame into it, and perhaps it would have gone badly with the baby. At any rate, Jack had gone back to Egypt, and died of dysentery when little Adrian was three years old, and she had remained beside her husband for thirty-five years, atoning for the sin that was no sin to her by unfailing patience and submission. Her child had been christened Adrian, and in agony of spirit she had heard her husband teach him night after night to thank God he was born a Harding. She had watched him grow up so like his father that at first fear clutched at her heart every time she looked at him, lest all the world should see what was so plain to her. As a child he had been high-spirited and rebellious, quick to resent and just as eager to forgive. And then gradually the constant talk of family and tradition, firmly soldered in by seven years of Eton, had done its work, so that by the time he went to Oxford the wild, beautiful thing she loved was caged behind bars of convention and reserve. He loved her, certainly, but she had had to watch him growing away from what she would have wished him to be—becoming year by year less spontaneous and less sensitive, more self-

conscious and more heedful as to what other people might think of him. Jack Hunt's enthusiasm for lost causes was no doubt responsible for her son's lack of humour, but then he thought it rather bad form to be enthusiastic about anything, so that he was between the devil and the deep sea, as Jack had never been. But oh! how appallingly he resembled his father in all the essentials of his nature! She knew, as Adrian could never have guessed she knew, what the loss of Hasil meant to him, because she realised how passionate he was, in spite of his outward coldness. And it raised a storm of anger in her to see that her son was sacrificing his love on the altar of a false god. The irony of it—that Jack's son and hers should be renouncing the girl he had chosen because of his duty to the Hardings! Terribly as she had suffered in the first years of her secret, she was suffering infinitely more now. Since the conversation on the terrace she had only spoken to him once of Hasil, and that was about eight months ago, just before the beginning of the autumn term.

"Married this month, I believe," he had said curtly, "so that is the end of *that* story."

But she had heard the note of pain in his voice beneath the indifference.

And now, since January, events were taking another turn. He was always mentioning a Miss Maxwell in his letters. Miss Maxwell, it appeared, had been at St Frideswide's with Hasil Lathom, but now she was staying in Oxford with her father. Mr Maxwell was at work on some much-involved classical point, and Adrian spoke with admiration of his scholarship and originality. They were all three often together apparently.

“ Mr Maxwell and his daughter invited me to supper last night, and I spent a very pleasant evening. . . . The Maxwells and I had tickets for the Balliol concert Sunday night. . . .” And presently : “ Mr Maxwell wanted to put in some reading at the Bodleian, so I took *Claudia* on the river. . . .” And then at the end of term, he had said he would like to invite them to the Old Hall for a week.

They had arrived a few days ago, and Mrs Harding saw at once that Mr Maxwell, able scholar and charming companion as he was, was only a pawn in the very ancient game of love. Watching Adrian as closely as she dared, she realised that this was not an over-mastering passion. His expression, habitually rather sullen, lightened when Miss Maxwell spoke, and he liked to be with her or to listen to her playing. But she never saw the look in his eyes that had been there when he spoke to her of Hasil that evening in her room, and she knew, as a woman must, that this was a love that could quite easily be kept within bounds in every direction. Just as surely she saw that Claudia loved Adrian with her whole heart. She spoke little, and was very much on her guard, but once she raised her eyes to his as he turned over her music for her, and that betrayed her to his mother. It seemed as if he had a chance of great happiness. The type of man he had become would be happier with a woman who adored him—provided she were not brainless—than with one who might oppose her will to his and see his weak points too clearly. Now, as Mrs Harding sat at her desk and watched them walking at the far end of the lawn, evidently much interested in some topic they were discussing, she wondered, as she had wondered so often

lately, what was the right thing for her to do. Claudia came of a very old and very proud family—what would she say if she knew that the man whose birth she thought equal to her own was the son of a penniless father, so poverty-stricken that he could not afford to give even his name to his child? Something must be done, and quickly—she could not carry the burden of it all to her death, and she knew that the end could not be very far off now: she only prayed it might be speedy.

She turned again, a little wearily, to the task of sorting and destroying. In a secret drawer there were a few passionate scrawls from Jack, written after he had gone to Egypt and knew that there was a child. He was horrified at her decision—he could not understand how she could go on living with Harding, and begged her in every letter to come to him and to bring the baby. She wondered where she would have been now if she had obeyed the promptings of soul and body, and gone. Left with a child of three to provide for, and yet no man's widow! It could not have been harder for her than it had been, but at least her son had not suffered, and God had been merciful, and not given her any more children—the fear of that had tortured her for years. . . . Then there had come a time of peace, and she had been comparatively happy with her music, her books, and her old people and babies, till Adrian's trouble two years ago. She had reproached herself bitterly then, telling herself that if she had gone away with him as Jack had implored her, she would have worked her fingers to the bone for her son, and he could have married whom he would. She had almost told him that night, but she had been frightened by

what he had said about name and family. It would inevitably alienate him, and he was all she had to love in the world, and her time was short. But it would not be fair to take her secret with her, she saw that now. In the short time Claudia had been at the Old Hall, she had shown herself very sympathetic to Adrian's mother—very anxious to love her. She was not a frivolous, thoughtless child—she was a woman, and she was deeply in love with Adrian. Women had not the same values for things as men—surely it was possible that it might matter very little to Claudia who Adrian's father was? And once she knew, Adrian himself would be guarded, in some sort, from the effects of disclosure from any other source. She would leave it to her as to whether Adrian should know or not—only she had not the courage to tell him herself.

She looked out through the window again. The pair were walking across the lawn to the house, and Fate played into her hands.

"Mother," called Adrian, "may I bring Claudia in to be entertained for a little while? She does so want to see your room, and I've got to catch the post."

"Why, of course you may, dear," she answered him, sweeping the torn fragments of her letters into the fire, and shutting the desk. "Do come in and sit down, Miss Maxwell. I was wanting a talk with you."

CHAPTER XXV

. . . THERE was silence for some minutes after Mrs Harding had finished speaking. She had told her story in short, nervous sentences, and Claudia had not interrupted in any way. She was sitting in a low chair by the fire, gazing inscrutably into the coals; it was impossible to tell from her face what her thoughts were, and her hands were lying quietly in her lap, the fingers loosely interlaced. At last she looked up, meeting Mrs Harding's troubled eyes fully.

"I can't tell you how good I think it is of you to trust me with this," she said at last, "but you have my secret in exchange, haven't you?—for I know that you know I love your son." A hot wave of colour swept over her face, but she kept her eyes bravely on the other woman's. "I don't think he knows, though, so you will not betray me, will you?"

"Hasn't Adrian spoken to you, then?" said Mrs Harding. "But I was so sure that you were more than friends." Had she made this supreme effort for nothing?

"No; he hasn't," said Claudia, "but all the same he made me—there was—I mean I think it was my fault he didn't."

"But, my dear child, if you love him?"

"Yes; but there are reasons. Father doesn't know anything about it of course, for one thing—and I don't know how I could bear to leave him alone."

"I should think, from what I have seen of him," Mrs Harding answered, "that he wants your happiness above everything else in the world. After all, he spared you for three years of college, didn't he? Still, I can quite understand you wanted time to think it over; and none of the joy that comes of plucking the flower is equal to the joy of thinking how wonderful it will be to pluck it. And now I want to ask you—what difference has what I told you made?"

"Difference?" Claudia asked. "Just this, that I want to prevent Adrian from ever knowing it, because I know he'll mind so terribly. This love of name is ingrained in him—it's become part of him, a mainspring of his nature. All his plans revolve round it—he wants to go into Parliament because Hardings always did; he wants a son so that the name may be perpetuated. I believe sometimes that it is the biggest thing in his life."

"Then all the years of suffering and anxiety go for nothing," said Adrian's mother, "since I can't shield my boy from unhappiness."

"But he needn't ever know. It is all so long ago, and nobody has ever guessed; it isn't likely that we need fear anything now. Now that I know, I shall feel so armed, somehow. I shall be on the alert, and I'm sure I shall be able to keep it from him. It would hurt him so deeply to know, and it wouldn't do any good. He mustn't ever find out."

"But about you, Claudia? Does it matter to *you*?"

"You see, Mrs Harding, I love Adrian with all there is of me—it's beyond all analysis. I can't think of things any longer as they affect me, only as they matter to him." Suddenly she left her chair and came

and knelt beside Mrs Harding. "And I love you too," she said; "because you are his mother, first, but for your own sake now. So I grudge the *waste* of it all—those years when you and his father might have been together, being happy."

Mrs Harding stroked her hair. "Don't you believe a minute of it was wasted, dear," she said. "I'm very tired of fighting, and perhaps it is cowardly to be looking forward to a rest, but I'm glad of it all. Even when I said just now it all went for nothing, I meant from Adrian's point of view, not mine. It has been pure joy to me to keep his life happy, and now that I see it is to remain so, I'm ready with my *Nunc dimittis*. Only I do pray that I *may* depart in peace."

Claudia, so rarely demonstrative, drew Mrs Harding's face down to hers.

"But we can't spare you, Adrian and I," she whispered. Mrs Harding smiled, almost gaily.

"I won't have you being selfish, Claudia. You will have each other, and I'm a little impatient for a sight of my beloved. You see, I'm not clever—all I know of books Jack taught me—and I'm glad of it, for I'm able to believe with all my heart that he's been looking for me all this while—and I'm just beginning to hope I sha'n't keep him waiting long. It's dreadfully unscientific of me, I know, but I'd rather believe I was going to see him again than be the most glorious daffodil or the most fragrant violet that ever was! I believe that's the gong for lunch, and I'm in the middle of all this mess." Then for a second she held Claudia tightly to her, whispered "God bless you, my dear daughter," very low, and released her. . . .

Claudia was glad when bedtime came. Mr Harding

had placed his really fine library at her father's disposal, and it was an understood thing that he retired there after dinner and worked as far on into the night as he wished. Mrs Harding usually rested on the sofa, and Mr Harding, Adrian and herself played three-handed bridge six evenings out of the seven. She watched Mr Harding more intently this evening, and a sense of the pathos—tragedy, almost—of his position filled her. He was so proud of his wife and son, so sure of himself and his belongings altogether. She noticed his insensitive hands, the lack of moulding in his features, the hint of brutality that was sometimes apparent in his attitude to things in general. All this was balanced by the man's "Englishness" somehow, so that on the whole she liked him. It was a type hitherto unknown to her and she had spent all her time at Old Hall wondering how he came to be Adrian's father. But Adrian respected him, even loved him, and that invested him with significance. She had grown to like these quiet evenings (though she hated bridge from the depths of her soul)—they were so intimate. But to-night she wanted to be alone and think, and the rubber seemed to drag on for 'an extraordinary length of time—there were nothing but "spade" declarations. Finally she and "dummy" went a reckless no-trumper, which brought about the consummation she desired, and left Mr Harding the exultant winner of the evening.

Once in her room, she lingered over her undressing. She was one of the least vain of human beings, but to-night she wanted to count up every gift she had which might make her seem fair in Adrian's eyes. She spent much longer than usual over her hair, brushing it out in separate strands, and glorying in its rich

colour when the light caught it. Really, now she came to think of it, she liked herself in her nightdress with her hair down. . . . She turned away from the glass, laughing and blushing—and, putting out the light, sat on the rug in front of the fire, clasping her knees. Her thoughts flew like homing doves to Adrian and her happiness, and then to the pitiful story to which she had listened that morning. How strange that his mother should think it might have made a difference! She was grieved, but only for his sake. Claudia did not possess, as did Hasil, the faculty for expressing her deepest feelings, even to herself: The thought of Adrian swept over her like a great wave, rendering her very spirit dumb, and she sat for some time bathed in joy. She could hardly believe that two years ago she had not thought it possible that Adrian could love her. And then her thoughts were homing doves no longer, but little tiresome gnats that buzzed and worried her.

What had there been between Adrian and Hasil? She had been dimly conscious that the reason she had not allowed Adrian to speak plainly was that she must know the answer to that old question before she could reply to him. She was to see Hasil quite soon now. She had often written urging her in the name of both Clement and herself to visit them at Graydales, but Claudia had held back—her innate sensitiveness telling her it would be better for them to know each other really well first. Hasil's letters were anything but satisfactory. There was never the least hint of trouble, but Claudia felt that she was not spontaneous, and there was never any word of happiness. And then, a few days ago, she had written as she had not done since her marriage, informing Claudia of the wonderful

fact that a baby was expected very soon, and begging her to come to Graydales.

"For of course you must be godmother, darling," she had concluded, "since you are the dearest thing I have."

Surely that was a strange sentence for an eight months' wife? But she might have meant the dearest thing after her husband. . . .

The fire was very low, and the room felt chilly in the cold hour before the dawn. She hurried into bed, and slept soundly—so soundly that the sudden hurry of feet along the corridor, the sound of voices, and the scrunch of wheels upon the gravel below her window did not wake her. She woke with a start when Ellen brought in her tea in the morning to notice first that Ellen's eyes were red with much crying, and next that it was nearly eight o'clock.

"What is the matter, Ellen?" she said kindly. "Did you get into trouble for oversleeping?"

Ellen began to cry bitterly. "No, miss," she sobbed, "but it's the dear mistress. The master went to her room as he always does just before he goes for his ride, and found her dead, miss. Just as peaceful and smiling as if she'd been sleeping. 'E galloped off to Guildford for the doctor, but he couldn't do nothing when 'e did come. Said she'd been dead some time, and it was 'eart failure."

She hurried from the room, forgetting to draw the curtains. Every servant in the Old Hall was devoted to Mrs Harding.

Claudia felt stunned. Was it possible that she was dead, when only yesterday she had been at breakfast pouring out tea and listening patiently to her husband's

rather tedious account of the incidents of his morning ride? They must go at once, she and her father, they could be of no use here. . . .

In the confusion of departure she was able to leave a little note in Adrian's room. She was not able to see him.

"DARLING [she wrote],—I am not ashamed to tell you I love you now that you are in such trouble. You will understand that I had to go away, but all my thoughts are yours."

Then, at the last, she stole into Mrs Harding's bedroom. She lay, as Ellen said, as if she were asleep—on her face the joy of a great reunion. It was as if her spirit had been keyed up to the highest possible pitch to fulfil its task—and once the thing was done it just snapped and broke. Claudia went out and gathered a bunch of primroses. The day was a riotously glad one—the earth exulting aloud in her own youth and beauty. Coming back to the darkened room she laid the flowers gently in the dead woman's hand, thinking that "Jack" would be happy to meet her so. There seemed no sadness about her going. It was as if a thing that had been wrong for years and years were suddenly put right for all time.

There was one thing that she, Claudia, had to do. Mrs Harding had distinctly said that she would tell no one but the woman who was to be Adrian's wife, who might herself tell Adrian if she chose, if for any reason it seemed imperative. It was only yesterday that she had been tearing up letters—suppose she had not had time to destroy all traces? She felt it was her duty,

since the dead woman had trusted her, to see that there was nothing for anybody else to know.

But in the sitting-room there was every sign that Mrs Harding had left her house in order. Indeed, her desk lay open with the pigeon-holes empty and the drawers unlocked. Only, beside the fireplace lay a tiny scrap of foreign notepaper, charred and blackened at the edges, bearing in a man's handwriting the one word, "baby." She picked it up and turned to leave the room. But as she did so, the portrait of Adrian as a baby of eighteen months arrested her. He was sitting on the grass, looking very fat and dimpled, in a much befrilled and beribboned frock, engaged in gravely eyeing "Laddie," a favourite collie of Mr Harding's, with the same serious, unhumorous look she knew so well. A big dark curl drooped heavily over his forehead. She felt she must have that photograph. Mr Harding had one exactly like it in the library, and surely there was nobody who could have a better claim to it than herself. She could not bear to think of that baby with no one to love him. He had lived all those years in the sunshine of his mother's love. She realised that the portrait had stood there as crucifixes stand sometimes, that when his mother had lifted her eyes to it, every sacrifice, every anxiety, seemed doubly and trebly blest. She took it from its place above the desk, and gently closed the door.

CHAPTER XXVI

A LITTLE more than a week after Mrs Harding's death, Hasil and Claudia sat together in the drawing-room at the Vicarage. Hasil had not been able to effect any radical changes in it. If she had been anything of a needlewoman, she could have re-covered the settee and the chairs with something better (it could not in any case have been worse) than their present very ugly chintz; but even then she could have done nothing with the carpet, which was hopelessly and blatantly unworn out. As it was, she had removed most of the pictures to the lumber-room, together with the embroidered plush piano-back which had been bequeathed by Clement's predecessor.

Claudia looked round the room, which was chilly in spite of the noisy gas fire that bubbled and hissed incessantly. It seemed so strange to think that this was Hasil's environment always—it was no place for a Bél-Princess! But Hasil herself was apparently in the best of spirits. She was busy working at a tiny head-flannel, and though her fingers seemed unaccustomed and unskilful, she handled her work very tenderly, smiling almost as if she saw already the wee face it was destined to frame. As yet Claudia was unable to make up her mind as to whether Hasil was happy in her lot or not. There was no question of her joy as to the baby's coming, or of Clement's either, but Claudia was by no means sure as to the nature of the relationship

existing between husband and wife. That morning at breakfast Clement had been fulminating against the tactics of the militant suffragettes.

"The longer I live," he had concluded, "the more certain I become that a woman's proper place is her home. She is the centre of a home, and queen of it."

"And if she has no home, what becomes of her as centre and queen?" Hasil had asked. The words were quiet, but they were accompanied by the same faintly contemptuous smile Claudia had noticed at Mallacombe.

Clement had replied: "Every woman could reign over one home if she chose," and had gone out of the room, but not before Hasil's smile had become a little scornful laugh.

On the other hand, a day or two ago Clement had spoken very sharply to his wife on the foolishness of a long walk she had taken to Wastwater and back. "You ought to think of yourself as entrusted with a very sacred charge, Hasil, and not abuse your health as you do."

To Claudia's astonishment, Hasil had not appeared to resent the rebuke, but had only answered: "I'm very sorry, dear; it was stupid of me, but I wanted so much to show it all to Claudia."

That was very likely the way in which married people managed their happiness, and no doubt they were both completely happy. But Claudia was quite certain that somehow it did not convince her; she would not be satisfied if she and Adrian were to be on those terms with each other. So far Hasil had told her nothing of herself but the fact that the baby was to be born next month, and that if it were a girl it was to be called Claudia, and if it were a boy Geoffrey Lathom, after her father.

"It is awfully nice of Clement to want baby to be

called after your father, isn't it?" Claudia asked. "So often men want their sons to have their own or their family's tiresome names."

"Yes; it's a great concession," replied Hasil, and this time there was no mistaking the bitterness in her tone. "We women go down to the River of Death and sometimes they let us choose the baby's name—things are managed funnily in this world!"

"Do you know, Hasil—we always tell each other things, don't we? Well, I was just a little bit disappointed you didn't tell me before about baby. I should have been so happy to know of your happiness, and surely you could trust me not to tell anybody else?"

"I wasn't sure, at first, myself—and then it didn't seem fair to tell you till I had told Clement. And I didn't tell him till I was absolutely obliged to—he would have driven me mad with his fussing and cosseting. It ought to be made compulsory by Act of Parliament for husbands to go away for a long sea voyage till the baby is safely born! Clement makes things ten thousand times worse by worrying me."

"He loves you so that of course he's anxious about you. But I thought you were splendid to take it so well when he scolded you for walking too far."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Hasil, "I don't mind that a bit—he was quite right to be angry about it, and I shouldn't think anything of him if he hadn't been. What I can't stand is his constant worrying as to whether my feet are wet, or if I've lain down in the afternoon, or the wisdom of drinking two cups of tea."

"How funny! If I had been in your place I should have minded very much more the way Clement spoke

about the walk than all the fussing over feet and sofas and tea put together ! ”

“ But then, as I’m always telling you, my dear, we are two exceedingly different people.” And there the subject dropped.

Claudia had not yet brought herself to confide her joy to her friend. She felt that she must first know Hasil’s side of the friendship with Adrian, and she did not quite know how to begin. She was only certain—and as strongly as she had been certain of anything in her life—that she could not give herself up to her happiness till she was satisfied. And her happiness was waiting for her, it seemed. Adrian had written to her, as soon as he had received her little note, of his great gladness in her love.

“ I’m not nearly good enough for you, dear,” the letter had ended, “ but I will give all my life to you.” That was just before she had left home for Graydales, and she had answered it at once ; his reply was due to-day. Hasil had said the afternoon post came in about four—would there be a letter for her? But, as a matter of fact, when Hilda came in she was on her knees under the dusty old settee looking for her thimble. So that it was Hasil, after all, who took the letters, and Hasil who saw at once that there was one for Claudia from Adrian. There was also one from her father, and Hasil gave the two to her with Mr Maxwell’s uppermost, saying merely :

“ How greedy of you to have two when there’s nothing for me at all ! ”

After tea, Claudia went upstairs, on the plea of hunting for a pattern of a day-flannel in her box, and Hasil was left to face her thoughts. She knew, of

course, that Claudia had been staying at the Old Hall, but she had thought that the link was solely between Mr Maxwell and Adrian as classical scholars. What a fool she had been never to think of Claudia in any connection with Adrian! What, after all, was more likely, thrown together as they appeared to have been lately? She clenched her nails into her palms, and the physical pain was almost a relief from the torture her thoughts inflicted. She realised, with a sort of horror at herself, that she could not endure the idea of Adrian's marriage with Claudia. She felt as if she could not go on living if that were to happen. She tried to tell herself that she must not think such things with her baby so near, that it could not matter to her whom Adrian married, that, if her love were real, she would rejoice that he had chosen anybody as splendid as Claudia—but it was all in vain.

Primitive instincts surged up in her—she wanted Adrian; she could not endure the thought of any other woman in intimate relationship with him. It was as if Clement had never existed—her whole passionate, undisciplined soul rose up in a bitter cry:

“Oh, Adrian, come back! I want you so!”

But when Claudia came down half-an-hour later, Hasil showed no trace of the stormy emotions that had raged in her. She seemed absorbed in the problem of the day-flannel, and was at once busy with measuring-tape and scissors, laughing gaily over Mrs Paterson's only comment on baby's advent: “Well, Mrs Dale, I see there's a little one coming. Better late than never!”

She gave Claudia no chance of any but the most trivial conversation, and talked so much during the

evening that Clement looked worried, and asked if she had been doing anything to excite herself. But Adrian had concluded his letter with a postscript which made Claudia more determined than ever to approach Hasil on the subject of their friendship :

“ Don’t say anything to Hasil of our engagement—she would not understand.” And unless she asked Hasil herself, she would never know whether there had not been a misunderstanding—there had quite evidently been something between them. The time had come to speak—it was not as if Hasil showed any signs of caring for him still.

When Clement went to his study shortly after nine, Claudia put her arm round Hasil.

“ Come upstairs and see me into bed,” she said, “ I’ve got a racking headache, and it’s no use my staying up any longer.”

But when they were up in the cheerless little spare bedroom, and she was brushing her hair, she said suddenly :

“ Hasil, do you mind telling me how much you and Adrian Harding mattered to each other? ”

So it had come ! Well, she would fight for her man as fiercely as any cave-woman. It would mean telling Claudia about her mother, but that was a small sacrifice if she could part her from Adrian. She made one last effort at telling herself that Claudia was her best friend, but her will felt paralysed except in this one direction.

“ No, I don’t see why I should mind,” she answered at last, “ but it is a long story, and there’s a good deal involved. I think I loved him from the very first minute I saw him at the Granvilles’ that afternoon.

It wasn't that I admired him whole-heartedly—I didn't; but I did feel very soon that we were made for each other, and that I had known his virtues and his failings all my life. I struggled against it for a long time, because I didn't know he cared for me; then the afternoon of the Granvilles' picnic that June term, he told me. I couldn't say anything to you because we wanted to tell our people first, and his father was away. . . . Then, on my twenty-first birthday I opened a letter my father had left for me telling me that my mother was a high-caste native lady and he had loved her—he said her presence brought blessing and peace always. . . . He told me that other people would mind—but I never thought that Adrian would feel anything but pleased and happy—because I was. The world was so wonderful that summer that I suppose I got things out of proportion—the only thing that mattered in the world to me was Adrian's daily letter. Anyway, I was not prepared for his answer, which told me that he could not face the prospect of children whose blood was tainted, and that therefore there could be nothing between us. And I could think of nothing but him, and asked nothing better but just to be with him! I couldn't let Aunt Selina and Uncle James guess anything, and, by the mercy of God, Clement's letter arrived about a fortnight after. You all thought Clement and I had been corresponding ever since Mallacombe, but as a matter of fact, that was the second letter I had ever received from him. I didn't love him—do you think he is the sort of man a woman like me is likely to love?—but I caught at the chance of covering my naked shame. . . . Thank God, Claudia, that you don't know the agony of shame one endures when one has told a man

one loves him body and soul, and he replies: 'I'm much obliged, but I find after all you won't do—so sorry to have troubled you.' But I married Clement, you see, and 'lived happy ever after.' "

She spoke in a hard, rather high-pitched voice, and her cheeks and eyes were blazing in the candlelight.

"What do you mean by that?" said Claudia tonelessly.

"I mean that I love Adrian Harding with every fibre and every nerve of me," answered Hasil, with a sudden fierce energy. "I mean that although I'm bearing another man's child, if Adrian Harding were to beckon to me and say 'Come,' I'd follow him to the ends of the earth! That shocks you, doesn't it?—your Brahmin soul with its overlay of English chastity and restraint doesn't understand my 'lawless passion' for a man who has no use for me. But it just is so—and you might as well tell the tide not to come in twice a day as try to make me feel differently. I'm as God and my parents made me, and there's no more to be said."

"But are you absolutely sure, Hasil, that Adrian wrote as he did because of your mother?"

"I don't think you'll see much room for doubt yourself when you read his letters." And she slipped across the passage to her own room, and returned with a packet.

"Read them all," she said, still in the same fierce tone, "I have no more value for them. . . . Good-night, Claudia—I want to be settled in bed by the time Clement comes up. He always wants to bother me with questions if he sees me awake, so I have to pretend to be asleep."

Claudia did not answer, and Hasil went.

Alone in her room she tried to evade her conscience. "Claudia is my great friend, and I was driven to confide in her." *That is not so, said the Voice; no consideration in the world would have led you to speak as you did merely for the sake of confiding in her. It was because you knew that there was some bond between Adrian and Claudia, and you tried to snap it. You are a Judas-friend to Claudia, because you deliberately tried to wreck her chance of great happiness. You can never be anything to Adrian yourself, and you don't want anybody else to be.* "Not at all," replied Hasil angrily; "but I'm quite sure Claudia won't make him happy." *You cannot know, said the Voice relentlessly, and if you could, that was not your reason. You don't mean to let her have the chance.* "You want the truth, my friend, and you shall have it, as Claudia had it. I love him and I want him and I can't bear the thought of any other woman." *Exactly, said the Voice, we come to the root of the matter at last.*

At that juncture her husband entered, and it became necessary for her to feign a persistently deep slumber all through his ceremonious undressing. When he knelt beside the bed, Hasil deliberately observed him. He had aged since the Mallacombe days—his features had become a trifle sharp, giving his face a sterner and more uncompromising expression. Although the April nights were chilly, he was quite twenty minutes on his knees, and Hasil saw that he seemed troubled, and asking for guidance in a difficult matter. "Praying for me, I shouldn't wonder," she thought scornfully. "How very much I resent his discussing my failings with somebody else!"

Long after her husband's regular breathing told her he was asleep, she lay awake, gazing wide-eyed into the darkness. Hers was the type of character which is able to gauge accurately the extent of its wrong-doing, while refusing utterly to abstain from it. Some people in her place might have deceived themselves into thinking that what had been said was said for Claudia's sake—but Hasil knew that she had done a despicable action, and, though she was ashamed of it, she did not wish it undone. She told herself that no woman who was expecting her baby in a month's time should think of a man not her husband, as she was thinking of Adrian—but she knew all the time that nothing would prevent her thinking. She drew aside the blind and looked out. Far distant she could see the dim outline of the crags round Wastwater, but they were bare and bleak. The very heavens seemed cold to-night, and she was on fire from head to foot, so that the linoleum came as a positive relief to her naked feet, and she was glad to feel the draught from the window blowing in upon her. But she could not bear the sight of the hills, and presently slipped back to bed, where she tossed and turned for another couple of hours.

At last she could stand it no longer; she must know what Claudia was going to do if she were to sleep at all that night. Clement was still sleeping peacefully, lying on his back with his hands folded on his breast, crusader-wise. She felt as if she were lying beside an utter stranger. Once more she crept cautiously out of bed, and felt her way across the passage to Claudia's room. Thank heaven! there was a ray of light under her door—she was awake, then. The next minute she cried "Come in!" in response to Hasil's cautious knock.

"Have you read his letters?" said Hasil.

"No," answered Claudia, "I have been thinking things out, and I've been thinking of your mother a great deal. I wonder what would have happened if she had lived."

"I shoudn't have been the lonely thing I am, for one thing," Hasil said bitterly. "I meant to show you father's letter to me—you shall see it to-morrow. I told Adrian about it directly I knew myself, thinking, like the little fool I was, he would be pleased. I think there's something really funny about that. But I didn't come to talk of that—I just want to ask you one question: are you going to marry Adrian Harding?"

Claudia looked into her eyes. "No," she said quietly. "And now, unless you are sillier than I take you for, you'll hurry back to bed before you catch a very bad cold. Good-night, Hasil dear." And she kissed her friend's mouth, as a man might.

CHAPTER XXVII

BUT when she had shut the door on her, Claudia sat down at the rickety little dressing-table. She had told Hasil that she had been thinking, but, as a matter of fact, her mind for the last hour or so had been a blank, except for the one train of thought about Hasil's mother. The muscles of her face seemed tense and strained somehow, and there was a great aching sensation at the back of her eyes; it was as if she had not slept for days. Her strongest feeling was an intense desire to absorb herself in some concentrated effort. She dreaded the direction her thoughts might take if left to themselves. It was very cold in the bare little bedroom—the grate was quite empty. (It had been filled with pink shavings when Hasil first saw it.) She put her thickest coat on, and drew the packet of letters which Hasil had left towards her.

On top lay Adrian's invitation to the Union, the first of all, and then his reply to her letter from Mallacombe. She read them steadily through from beginning to end—there were not very many in all. Her heart nearly failed her when she came to the impassioned letters he had written to her at Castle Holme. This was not the Adrian she knew—this was a lover beside himself with love, giving himself up to his passion, not caring if he betrayed himself. Instinctively she knew that Adrian would never write to her like that—till she read these letters she had not dreamed that she would wish it.

She realised now that she had never seen this man; she had never penetrated and would never penetrate to the depths of Adrian Harding's soul as Hasil had done.

Could Adrian have written this?—"My spirit is on fire for you day and night—your pure sweet presence haunts my dreams and will not let me be. I want to ride out into the world's tourney and fight for you; I feel that with you beside me I could do anything. Darling, when we are one the name of Harding shall shine as it never shone before (for all my glorious ancestors!)—and our children's children shall rise up and call us blessed. . . ." Claudia laid beside this the letter she had received that afternoon, and read it dispassionately through. It seemed to her as if she had picked up in the road a bright and shining thing she believed to be a diamond, and lo! out of the sunlight she knew it for nothing but broken glass. How stilted the sentences seemed! She could hardly believe that a few hours ago she had kissed the pages again and again to think his hand had lain there as he traced the words: "I look forward with joy to our peaceful hours together in the future. I keep on wondering how you could love such a surly fellow—everyone will call us Beauty and the Beast. And you have such a beautiful mind, my Claudia; it does me good just to sit beside you and listen to your playing—it seems to me that you are thinking aloud then, and I get to know you better. . . ." They had been such golden words this afternoon, and now the magic was all spilled.

He admired her—ah, there was no doubt of that!—and he trusted her, but *love*! This was a middle-aged love, with an eye to peace and comfort—he had loved Hasil as a man loves his mate. She had thought his

reserve a fine thing, and had been glad that it should lessen very gradually, as ice before the sun—she saw now that it would never lessen, it was ingrained in his love for her, such as it was.

She could hardly have told how she knew this so surely—her instinct discovered it in a thousand signs and tokens. Why, his fourth letter to Hasil was written to meet her at Castle Holme on her arrival, when she had only been parted from him a few hours.

“DARLING,—I love you, I love you, I love you. Your
“ADRIAN.”

A little later he told her of himself—that his early days at college were unhappy, for instance—and, more significantly, that he had let other women matter to him in the past. “But my *soul* has waited for you, beloved—and one day you will understand and forgive.”

She, Claudia, had been much more with him than Hasil could have been at the time that letter was written, and never once had he mentioned himself in the most trivial connection. She had thought then that the way he evaded any personal reference was the outcome of a strong man’s shyness, and that he gave himself when he spoke of classical subjects or of music to her. In reality he had given less than the best and deepest of himself in return for her all.

She sprang up at this crisis in her thinking and looked out, the verse recurring involuntarily to her: “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.” Unlike Hasil, she found strength and healing in the shadowy outline of those old giants—it was

as if they had said to her: "Endure, as we do—storms beat on us; winds harry us; the sun scorches; but we abide in our strength." One had only to look beyond personal issues to the great principles at stake, and all would be well.

There was truth in Hasil's conception of Claudia. While everything that Hasil felt of bad or good was coloured and determined by her own particular emotion towards it, for Claudia the vital question was always, not "How does this affect me?" but "How does this affect the world in which I live?" Consequently, small, individual troubles had not the significance for her they had for other people, since she saw the world as a whole moving towards good, and people at college who had failed for the Boat Test, or been left out of the Eleven after all, were apt to find her unsympathetic. Hers was the scientific spirit, which concentrates itself on the final result, and is concerned with individuals mainly as they affect that result. But her love for Hasil warred against all her beliefs. Hasil appealed to her imagination, so that those qualities she would have condemned in anybody else seemed picturesque and full of colour because they belonged to Hasil. She loved her as a mother might love the lawless and undisciplined member of a well-conducted family, or as a man who is by nature somewhat reserved and not given to acting on impulse loves a woman who is the exact opposite. Beside Hasil she always felt colourless and dull. Principles seemed merely conventional ideas, and she felt herself lacking in warmth and passion, because she could not express herself. None of this seemed to matter when it was not a question of comparison and contrast with Hasil. But it seemed that Adrian felt the

potency of Hasil's charm as keenly as she did—his letters to her revealed a kindled and transfigured self. Remained the problem—what ought she to do in the matter? Putting her father out of the question, Hasil and Adrian were the two people she loved best in the world—and it seemed that she must give up one or the other. If she were to marry Adrian, she felt certain she must lose Hasil. Without understanding completely the deliberateness of her friend's self-betrayal, she knew her well enough to realise that only the very strongest feeling could have made her speak as she had done—could have made her, above all, come back to ask that last question: "Are you going to marry Adrian Harding?"

Claudia saw quite clearly that there could be no three-cornered friendship between Hasil, Adrian and herself, if she were Adrian's wife. On the other hand, if she broke off what was virtually her engagement to Adrian, what remained? Hasil was another man's wife, in any case. If she took no steps and allowed things to take their course, nothing would be any different; she was the only living person who knew that the bar between Hasil and Adrian had no real existence. Adrian believed that Hasil was lost to him, and he saw sufficient prospect of happiness with her herself to want her to marry him. And she knew that she could make him happy. Not, perhaps, with the fiery, intoxicating happiness he would have known with Hasil, but neither, on the other hand, would there be the depths of gloom and depression into which Hasil's moods would periodically plunge him. She knew herself to be more equably poised than Hasil, and temperamentally more in control of her emotions. Her father's intellectual

companionship would be a real gain to him—he had said so many times. And the sons he seemed to mention so frequently in his few letters to Hasil would be healthy and pure-blooded. She felt that he would never say to her as he had said to Hasil: “Beloved, to think that you will love me deeply enough to bear my children!” That was it—there was no slightest element of sex in his love for her. She had been glad of it till now—till she understood that no love of his for a woman could be complete without it.

So far nothing of the sort had troubled her peace; her attitude towards the whole subject was impersonal. She wanted to be one with Adrian because of the sacred intimacy it would establish between them, and because she longed for children with the whole strength of her nature; of the passionate, personal element which was so fierce and so demanding in Hasil she knew nothing. That was the link between the two, evidently—the call of the blood. It was Nature herself who was striving to bring them together, and it would be futile to oppose man-made laws and her own desire to a world-force. She had only to remember the tragedy of Mrs Harding’s life, she thought. Nothing of this would have happened if she and Jack Hunt had been allowed to marry. She could not take the whole problem into her hands, but it seemed clear that Adrian ought to know the circumstances of his birth; and then he and Hasil must decide the issue between them. Less than a fortnight ago she had determined that it would be for his greatest happiness if he never discovered the blot on his ’scutcheon, but she had decided that for the Adrian she knew. He and Hasil both, as revealed by this packet of letters in front of her, seemed total strangers to her; she could

not imagine that one had been her lover, and the other her greatest friend. . . .

So all her reasoning led her back to the answer she had instinctively given her friend, the only answer possible.

Then for a time she raged against her fate—why should she ever have come within sight of her happiness, only to lose it for the second time? That June term, when Adrian and Hasil had been seeing one another so constantly, she had fought her battle, and she believed she had come off conqueror. What good could there be in this waste of happiness? But again the mountains, clearer now in the first lifting of the curtain of night, spoke to her, weary with the long struggle: “There is no waste,” they seemed to say, “always life is fight, but the strong endure.”

When she awoke the sun was up, and Clement, in the tiny bathroom at the end of the passage, was fervently singing the *Venite Exultemus*. She sprang up, braced with the conflict, and seeing her way clearly. It was Hasil who was heavy-eyed at breakfast, confessing to a sleepless night. Claudia was conscious of her furtive gaze from time to time, and knew that she was wondering if she had really meant what she had said. But she could not relieve her anxiety at present—she could do nothing till she had written to Adrian.

When breakfast was over, she deposited Hasil, warmly wrapped up, in a sunny part of the garden, and helped the Hilda of the moment with the morning’s work. Hilda succeeded to Hilda at the Vicarage—and the last Hilda was always worse than her predecessor. Hasil had no aptitude whatever for domestic duties; she could teach her servants nothing, and her apathy soon influenced them into losing interest in their work.

It was a thoroughly uncomfortable house to stay in; and since Hasil had known of her baby's coming she had let things go altogether. Claudia did what she could, but Hasil was very quick to resent interference, and she could not do nearly as much as she would have wished.

She watched Hasil now through the kitchen window as she helped Hilda to wash up. She was lying listlessly in her basket chair, doing nothing, gazing rather vacantly into space. It was natural that her face should be thinner and sharper, but there was an expression on it Claudia did not like. It reminded her of a smouldering fire, which is only waiting its time. Her face rarely softened nowadays—and then, only at the mention or the thought of her baby. The baby!—what was going to become of it if Hasil went to Adrian? Well, in any case it would not suffer as Adrian had done—for Clement would see that it was cared for, and almost certainly bring it up himself. He was devoted to children and was always loved by them.

Claudia felt very warmly towards Clement. She saw his irritating absence of any sense of humour, and realised that he would get more and more "groovy" and narrowminded as he grew older. But there was an intrinsic worth in the man—he was so absolutely sincere and single-hearted, and so deeply in love with his wife. His faults appeared to Claudia as the defects of his qualities, and, in any case, she would have regarded them more leniently than her friend did; it did not seem to her, as to Hasil, a deadly sin to be unable to see a joke. (Adrian, although he took himself so seriously, had a rather biting wit, which Hasil very likely accepted as substitute.)

The letter to Adrian had better be written at once, while the flush of battle was on her. There was no point in delay. She dried her hands to the accompaniment of Hilda's grateful thanks, and went upstairs to her room. It would be easier to write under the auspices of the hills.

It was not a long letter. It told him briefly what she had learnt from his mother, and dwelt on all that her secret had cost her for thirty-four dreary years, and how much she had suffered for her son. It went on to say that Hasil had told her what there had been between them and the reason for its ending. "I thought that you, as I know you, would be happier if I kept what your mother told me from you," it concluded, "but I understand indubitably that you cared for Hasil as you could never care for me, and it does not seem right to conceal the truth from you any longer. You and she must decide what you are to do next. I hope you will not take it too much to heart, Adrian—if you could have heard the way in which your mother spoke of your father to me, you would be quite sure that he was a splendid person. Life was very hard to them, I think. Don't worry about me—my life won't be empty—I find the world too wonderful for that. Only—do you understand, dear?—I love you too well to be able to accept anything but the best from you. Things don't seem very clear to me now, but I hope there will be a way out for you and Hasil presently. You know that she is expecting her baby next month? . . ."

There was nothing to do but wait for an answer. She had done the best she could for them all. It was very difficult to feel that life held anything ahead worth the doing, for all her brave words to Adrian, but

Claudia was inherently a fighter. Her father spoke of a long-planned trip to Greece, to the scene of some excavations which were the talk of classical Europe. She would try and get work to do while he was gone. He would not need her; there would be too many congenial friends for him to feel at all lonely. She could, no doubt, as a "First," get work in Oxford, or at worst an editing job from the Clarendon Press, but she felt she was not ready for work of that order yet. She wanted to tire her energies, and yet to feel that she was doing a thoroughly useful thing which took all her thoughts and all her time. There were no financial considerations that need weigh with her. She would like to share with people who could not have known it otherwise, the joy that books had been to her. Was it absurd to want to teach the women lounging in the doorways of mean streets the great underlying truths of Shakespeare's tragedies, for instance? Would it not be possible that their own grey sorrows might be lightened if she could reveal some purpose behind them all? She could not teach them Christianity as the average "slummer" understands it, because she was not sufficiently sure herself of its value, but other great literature held religious truths too.

Hasil laughed bitterly when she heard of the scheme. "You should have seen me reading 'Paradise Lost' to my mothers," she said, "it would have convinced you once and for all of the utter uselessness of trying to educate the Megasalautos."

"But of course they couldn't follow it," said Claudia, "it's like trying to feed a new-born baby on meat!" And she held steadily to her purpose, in spite of Hasil's gibing.

CHAPTER XXVIII

It was some days before Adrian replied, and Claudia tried with all her strength to devote herself to Hasil, and not to think at all of his answer. Hasil seemed very far from well. She was restless and slightly feverish, and though, no doubt, her excessive irritation was only an outcome of her condition, it did not make for happiness. On one occasion, Claudia, hearing the latch of the gate click, had gone to open the door for Clement, and he had taken the opportunity of asking her in a low voice how his wife was. Claudia had replied that she had been resting quietly in the garden most of the morning—and then they had gone into the parlour together. To their surprise a furious Hasil confronted them.

“If you two have anything to whisper about,” she said vehemently, “I wish you would have the good taste to wait till I am out of the way.”

“Hasil!” exclaimed Claudia, and looked at Clement.

“I was merely asking Claudia how you were,” he said wearily.

“Why on earth can’t you ask me? I’m not deaf or dumb, am I?—and I suppose I’m likely to know more about my health than anybody else. Anyway, I won’t stand it, do you hear?—I just won’t stand it. It isn’t as if it were the first time.”

She went out of the room, and refused to come down again till after tea, when she maintained a silence that

was almost more trying than abuse, for the rest of the evening.

"It seems to me I'd better go," Claudia said, when she had finally gone upstairs to bed. "I think I'm doing more harm than good."

"Don't desert her, Claudia. You're the only friend she has, poor little girl! She's alienated most people up here, though they were willing enough to be friendly when she came. I believe Mrs Blackford Smith is coming to her for the actual time, but you see how lonely and depressed she is now."

"I don't mind a bit the things she says, but it's no good if I'm going to aggravate her."

But he begged her so earnestly to stay that she consented to remain at Graydales a few days longer. It hurt her keenly to see the change in her friend. She missed the delicate, elusive charm that had always attracted her so strongly. She could hardly believe that "vulgar" was the word that kept coming to her mind, but there certainly was a strange new violence about Hasil. The language she used, the very way she smoked in the teeth of Clement's openly expressed disapproval was somehow lacking in refinement and sensitiveness. Her face had altered in some subtle manner, and so had her manner of dressing. She had always looked so charming in the clothes she wore. They had not been conspicuous or in any way striking, but they had seemed part of her. It was so odd of her to want to be noticeable now, but it was impossible to influence her at all. She only said bitterly that everything at Graydales was brown and grey but herself.

Claudia thought at first that the baby's coming would put everything right, but she was beginning to feel

apprehensive as the time drew nearer. Hasil was so reckless of her health. For days she would lie apathetically in the house or the garden, and then she would suddenly tire herself out with a walk to the sea and back. Coming back one afternoon drenched in spray, she said curtly as she limped up the path: "You can both of you spare your arguments and your protests, I should have died if I hadn't gone."

She looked very ill and complained of sleeplessness, but except for that one outburst in Claudia's room, she had vouchsafed her friend no confidences whatsoever. Claudia made one attempt to break through the reserve.

"Dearest," she said tenderly once, laying down the book she had been reading aloud, "can't you talk to me? It hurts me to see you so unhappy."

"My dear girl," was Hasil's reply, accompanied by a little strained laugh, "why, we talk morning, noon and night! As for looking unhappy, you mustn't expect me to be at my best just now. But then, of course, you don't know anything about it."

Which was too much even for Claudia's loving heart, and she never referred to the subject again. It was a very wearing time for those who loved Hasil, and in the middle of it Adrian's answer arrived. It was so short that Claudia read it almost before she was aware of it.

"Thank you for your letter [it began, without any prefix], and for the information it contains. I can quite understand that believing as you do that I have no right to my name and position, you are anxious to dissolve our engagement, and I hasten to release you. As you say you hold no proof whatever, and the hero

and heroine are dead, I am afraid I must decline to consider it anything but the delusion of an invalid. The situation remains the same as far as I am concerned, and should you choose to disturb my father's peace of mind, I warn you that you will find it difficult to convince either him or anybody else of the truth of a story you so unhesitatingly accept yourself."

It broke off abruptly there, and was unsigned. It was a cruel letter, but the strongest impression that remained with her was that he did absolutely believe what she had told him, and could not face the consequences. His suffering was as plain to her as if he had written of it; she saw it in the brief, stilted sentences, and the absence of the slightest sign of affection for her. And because she understood this, it was impossible for her to hate him, though he had wronged her so. She wanted to go to him, to comfort him, to tell him that she knew how deeply his pride was wounded, but that he need not deceive her, since she loved him better than anything in the world. . . . She was surprised to realise that she still felt life was worth living, and felt it more keenly than she had done that night in her room. Her scheme of teaching was maturing in her mind, and she had already written to Miss Ranmore, asking her if she considered it at all feasible. She could never marry, not even for the children she so passionately desired, but her life might be very full, nevertheless. . . . If only he had acted up to the best in him she felt she could have given him up more easily. It was just because he had been so humanly at fault that she wanted him to belong to her. She wondered if she had been wrong in telling him.

On the face of it, the only result seemed to be her own estrangement from him, but she knew that to be a superficial valuation. It had been an ordeal by fire, and he had failed in it, but it was better that it should have happened. . . . She kissed the dear, fat baby face in the photograph a hundred times, and sent it back to him with the words: "I think you ought to have this. I took it from your mother's room."

She understood Adrian ever so much better now, perhaps even better than Hasil did, because she had seen his two diverse selves as revealed in his letters to the two women who loved him. She thought that he, too, would very likely not marry. He would succeed his "father" at the Old Hall in due time, and he would make a very good landlord and an able member of Parliament, and the other self in him would demand *affaires du cœur* from time to time—some reputable and others not—and sometimes he would remember.

The law of compensation eternally works, and who shall say how far it was due to poor Jack Hunt's diatribes against Government and landed gentry, that his son worshipped aristocratic tradition? To Claudia, who did not know much about Adrian's father, it seemed that the theory she had always held was in a fair way to be disproved, and environment was, after all, a stronger factor than heredity. She did long to know one thing most intensely, and that was, whether Adrian had written the phrase "*my father's* peace of mind" of set purpose, or unconsciously. Not that any of it mattered really—the thing was over. She was ashamed to find herself relieved that her stay at Graydales was nearly ended. She did not feel that Hasil

really wanted her, and to be with her did not make it easier to forget Adrian. She stayed till Mrs Blackford Smith arrived and then went home to her father, captain of her soul.

Hasil did not miss her friend at first. She was more glad than she thought she had it in her to be to see Aunt Selina. She stood for the peaceful things of life, and her own spirit was so tempest-tossed. She asked hungrily after Charlotte Knollys and the dogs, and was very grieved to find that "Bacon" had caught his foot in a rabbit-trap and gone to the dog Valhalla. They had all sent her messages—Uncle James had contributed a cheque for ten pounds and Miss Royston had knitted a little—such a little—jacket, threaded with blue ribbons—"blue for a boy," as Aunt Selina explained. Conditions began to improve within half-an-hour of Aunt Selina's coming. The gentle little lady was secretly horrified to find the Vicarage so poverty-stricken and comfortless, but she accepted the tiny spare room and its rickety furniture without a murmur. She showed Hasil how to have everything in readiness for the baby's coming, she made the necessary arrangements for the nurse, and—more wonderful still—she did something magical to the parlour and the dreadful drawing-room. Hasil would let her do things she would have resented from Claudia as interference, with the result that her own health and spirits began to improve by reason of her more cheerful surroundings. Aunt Selina was even teaching Hilda to cook!

But, with it all, life was going sufficiently hard with Hasil. The ground seemed to be cut away from under her feet. She felt that she had no friend in whom she could trust, and no religion she could look to for

support. The enthusiasm that might have been kindled into a flame at college had died out under what she considered the narrowness and unloveliness of Clement's belief. Deprived as she was of any outlook beyond the very limited parochial horizon, her soul cried out for colour. Claudia had taken Adrian from her because Claudia, through no act of hers, was of good English family. Certainly she had said she was not going to marry him, and no doubt she believed what she said, but Adrian did not write long letters to women in platonic friendship. She and Claudia had been growing apart ever since the Schools results; their lives ran in entirely different channels, and there seemed very little to keep them together. If Claudia were to marry Adrian Harding, Hasil knew that must be the end of their friendship, for she could not bear it. . . . As for religion, she had lately been more and more attracted to the idea of Roman Catholicism. The services, surely, would feed one's hunger for beauty—the ritual would be the glorious raiment clothing a beautiful idea. But what attracted her more than all was the thought of confession. To unburden one's soul of all the pestilent thoughts that crowded in on it, and poisoned life for one! To get real comfort and sympathy for one's unhappiness! . . . She felt sometimes, when she saw Clement leave his desk and step into the aisle, that it would kill her to have to listen ever again to his monotonous intoning of the Litany. Every word he uttered in his sermons irritated her, and very frequently she imagined that he was preaching at her.

She was, in fact, in such a state of nervous tension that his mannerisms goaded her to the verge of madness. He had a funny little way of clearing his throat

that at first she had teased him for, but one day at supper (luckily Aunt Selina was not down) she suddenly exclaimed: "For God's sake, Clement, don't keep on clearing your throat, or I shall go mad." He had said nothing. It had come to that with him. He had lost heart utterly in his zeal for reforming his wife. He did not understand her, and he regarded it as highly important she should not be over-excited.

To Hasil it seemed that since he no longer tried to exert any authority over her, the salt had indeed lost his savour—life with Clement was a very mawkish affair, with neither scenes nor the reconciliation consequent upon them to relieve the monotony. She did not know—and would have been very angry if she had known—that Clement wrestled every night with the Lord in prayer for her soul.

She found him uninteresting and commonplace. He never praised her looks, and never appeared to notice what she wore, unless it were to criticise it as too glaring for Graydales. It made her furious that he was universally adored in the parish, when she found him so impossible. She could see no good in him at all; she taunted him with lack of manhood for the strong curb he put upon all his appetites; she refused to share the fact of the baby's coming with him, and persistently referred to it as "my baby." And he did not understand that she was desperately unhappy, and that the only thing to do was to take her in his arms and *will* her to love him. He had never realised the hold he had on her in the rare moments when he used his authority as her husband.

Latterly he had ceased to exert it at all, for fear of the scenes he dreaded for both their sakes. He could

only conclude that his wife thoroughly disliked him, and that at a time when there was every reason for them to be closely in touch. He took to shutting himself up for hours together in his study on the plea of work, and he occasionally went out for long walks and mountain scrambles with the Paterson boys, finding it in his heart to wish sometimes that he might not come back. But more often he visited his parishioners, that the love of some of the poorest and neediest might salve his sore heart.

Clement was a very good example of his type. He had probably never had—certainly never gratified—a selfish wish. No tramp went away empty from the Vicarage door, even if it were the Vicar's dinner that he carried away with him. But he had—by instinct, not on principle—no mercy for sins of the flesh, and “therefore,” as Hasil used to declare triumphantly, “is Clement Dale become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.” He thought passion in any form, in life or in art, a very evil thing, and, as has been said, he distrusted beauty because he thought it ministered to men's passions. His outlook would have been barren and limited to a degree, except that for him it was radiant with the light from the Cross. It has been given to very few to see the vision as Clement saw it, and that enabled him to steer a straight course through a very difficult sea, though it did *not* enable him to understand his wife. . . .

There came a day when Hasil knew her time was come, and the first thing for which she provided was that Clement should be absent from the Vicarage the whole day. . . . It seemed to her that her body had become the sport of fiends who were fighting among

themselves as to which of them should rend her limb from limb.

"How much longer, nurse?" she gasped, when she felt that she had reached her limit of endurance.

"Only another four or five hours, Mrs Dale," said the nurse cheerfully, "the pains are coming along nicely now."

Another four or five hours! Where was she to get the strength to go through with it? Even in her pain she knew that Clement would have said that prayer would help her, but she was biting her lips to keep back words she had never known she had heard. It was all so horrible—the presence of Dr Paterson, the odious familiarities of the nurse, and the intolerable pain. She tried to think of her baby, but could not feel that the sweetest baby in the world would be worth this agony.

And so it went on for close on fifteen hours more, until even Dr Paterson began to look anxious, and the nurse was no longer cheerful. Clement, coming back from a long day in Whitehaven, was met by a pale and trembling Aunt Selina, who had no news to give him. Endless cans of hot water were sent for, but there was no sound in the room above their heads, except a faint moaning at intervals. They sat in two of the very uncomfortable chairs in the parlour, and tried to talk. Aunt Selina refused to go to bed—she might be wanted, she said. Clement prayed silently that if his wife were spared to him he might be allowed to devote his whole life to her happiness. He had not been sufficiently patient in the past, and he had expected too much of her. He could only see her charm and her sweetness when he thought of her now; the unhappiness of the last few months was blotted out.

At last, just as the grandfather clock in the passage outside was striking five, and the light was filling the dingy little room, they heard Dr Paterson's heavy step on the stairs.

"Your wife has had a very rough time, Dale," he said, looking in at the door, "but she'll do well now, with plenty of care and rest. We weren't able to save the baby, I'm sorry to say—strangulation . . . we did all we could—a boy. I'm very, very sorry, old chap."

The door clanged behind him, and they saw him hurry past the window down the street to his home.

They looked at each other dully, the same fear in their minds. How would Hasil take it? She had counted so much on the baby, and now that she had suffered so terribly for it, she was not to have it. Aunt Selina was crying quietly in her chair—Clement had walked to the window, and stood looking out, his face drawn and grey with the night's vigil.

"She will ask for the baby presently," he said, "if she has not done so already. What are we to say to her?"

"Couldn't we say that the doctor thought it might excite her, and so it has been taken to another room?" faltered Aunt Selina.

"You can try," said Clement, "but I think she will know."

As they were sitting at breakfast, the nurse came down to ask if Mrs Blackford Smith would go up to her patient for a minute.

"She is just waking up, m'm," she said, "and if she asks for the baby, I think it will be better if there is somebody with her she knows. But you'll be very quiet, won't you?"

Hasil turned her head with an inexpressibly weary gesture as her aunt came into the room.

"Is that you, Aunt Selina? It's all over, you see, and I'm still alive, though only just. . . . Don't you want to see the baby? It's a boy. Where is baby, nurse? I want to see him."

"Dr Paterson thinks you had better not see him just yet, dear," Aunt Selina said nervously, "you might get excited, and that would be so bad for you. Be patient for a little while, and you'll soon feel yourself again."

"What nonsense!" Hasil exclaimed peevishly. "Not see him after all I've been through for him? I think I could sleep if I just held him in my arms—I'd be very careful."

Aunt Selina burst into tears. Hasil looked sharply from her to the nurse, and knew. Her face hardened curiously.

"We sha'n't have any use for Miss Royston's little blue-for-a-boy jacket," she said quietly, "it had better be sent back to her."

Then she turned her head away from them, and closed her eyes.

CHAPTER XXIX

HASIL made a very slow recovery, in spite of her naturally strong constitution. It was difficult to rouse her to take an interest in anything, and she had not spoken of the baby again, nor shed a tear. Aunt Selina made one or two attempts at mentioning the subject, but such a terrible look came into Hasil's eyes that the poor lady was frightened and gave it up.

When she was strong again, Clement asked her one day if she would not like to receive the sacraments.

"No," she said, looking him full in the face, "and perhaps I'd better tell you now, Clement, that I never mean to enter a church again. I was 'churched' to please you, and because I was still thinking things out. I don't know what you mean to do about it, and whether you will think you can't live with me any more, but my decision is quite final. You see, I've had some time to think it over."

"Don't trouble about such things now, dearest," said Clement gently, "you will feel different about it when you are stronger. I know how hard it is for you to bear, and I wish you wouldn't shut me out; perhaps I could help you."

"Nobody can help me," Hasil answered, "and there is no possibility of my decision changing."

Still Clement did not give up hope. He had laid everything before his God—He would not leave him in despair. He told himself that it was natural Hasil

should feel as she did in the first days of her loss; afterwards time would soften the blow for her, and she would see things normally once more. He must be unfailingly gentle and patient with her, and perhaps she would come back to him.

But she did not spare him. He came home one day to find that she had moved all her belongings into the spare room. She refused to discuss her reasons with him, merely saying, as before, that nothing could alter her decision.

"But what are we to do if a visitor comes?" said Clement, when he had used every other available argument, and failed.

"My dear Clement, visitors are not very frequent, are they? And if they do come, they can still be dealt with. If it's a man he can share your bed, and if it's a woman, I'm afraid you'll be put to the serious inconvenience of giving up your room to us. But I don't think you need worry yourself, that is a *very* remote contingency."

Clement said no more, but he was more deeply wounded than he had been by any of his wife's actions hitherto. To a man, even the best of his sex, one baby is very much the same as another, and he had been hoping in his heart of hearts that Hasil would some day be able to console herself with another child. Dr Paterson had said she was a perfectly healthy mother; no one could have foreseen that the thing would turn out as it had done, and there was no placing a finger on the cause of it.

And now that hope was very nearly quenched, and he saw no single ray of light to redeem the situation. He knew that Hasil lay awake night after night, for he could hear the cheap little bed creaking under her as

she tossed restlessly from side to side, and once he heard her sobbing quietly whenever he woke up, but he dared not comment on it, lest he should alienate her still further. It was in God's hands, and God would show him the way out. . . .

For some time Hasil's spirit was so numbed by the mental and physical pain she had endured that she could hardly think. She was like a child or a dog whose instinct tells it what it wants and does not want, and who follows that instinct unquestioningly. She knew that it was impossible for her to go to church, or to share a room with Clement; but she dimly understood that if she traced those instincts of aversion to their source, she would find pain waiting for her, and she shrank from that with every nerve in her. If she discovered herself thinking back to the time of pain she had endured, she resolutely checked herself. She strove to put everything out of her mind that could remind her of it. Aunt Selina had laid away all the baby clothes in a drawer in the spare room, carefully wrapped in tissue-paper, with fragrant lavender stalks among them, plucked from the garden at Castle Holme. Hasil, finding them there, had shaken out the lavender and given the whole bundle to Clement to distribute in the parish among the mothers with very large families and very small purses.

"It is very good of you, dear," said her husband, when she explained the contents.

"I don't know what you mean, Clement. They'll only get the moth in them, lying by like that—far better to find somebody who needs them."

He had thought she was going to break down then, but she had gone quickly upstairs again, and the next

moment she was singing " *La donna è mobile* " overhead.

And then Claudia sent her Sir Edwin Arnold's translation of the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*, and Hasil knew from that that she understood everything from the beginning.

They were in the early days of June, and she had not known that the country could look so lovely. The copses were full of bird songs and the meadows of lambs. Noting the rich green of the fields, she remembered Wordsworth's mention of " the practice of bringing down the ewes from the mountains to yeans in the valleys," and how he goes on to explain that it is due to their " constant cropping of the herbage " that the pasture-land keeps the wonderful emerald it would otherwise have lost in a week or two. Her books were far more real to her than her actual world—she was always applying images she loved to the beauty around her. She lay out of doors all day, either in the garden or in a field near, and, whenever she felt strong enough, on the seashore. It was worth the extra exertion to get to the sea, because she always came back feeling better. And her companion on these solitary walks was always the same, the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*, the Song of Songs—that golden philosophical dialogue between the hero Arjuna and the god Krishna, while the opposing armies of the Kauravas and the Pândavas are drawn up ready to fight at the battle of Kuru-Kshetra. She understood for the first time that the essence of true Brahminism lay in the thought that the ideal state is the annihilation of individuality, whence a man may see God in everything and everything in God.

" . . . to see one changeless Life in all the Lives.
And in the Separate, one inseparable."

She learnt much about the need of sacrifice—that the nearer one approaches the Divine Presence, the less tenaciously does one clutch one's possessions; the Happy Warrior of the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ* being he who, like Wordsworth's, is moved neither by prosperity nor misfortune, and is willing to give up all he holds dear for the sake of the Vision.

“Near to Renunciation—very near
Dwelleth Eternal Peace! . . .”

She was surprised to see how often the teaching seemed to run parallel with that of the New Testament. If it were written before Christ, as Mr Kasinath Telang and many others held, then Claudia was right, and all great men had a vision of the Truth. All she knew was that it appealed to her as the Gospels had not done; it was as if she had suddenly come on a dear familiar language, forgotten since childhood, but remembered as soon as found. She was careful not to let Clement see her reading it. She could not have borne to be questioned about it.

Her relations with her husband were most unhappy—they seemed to drift further apart every day. As she became more absorbed in the teaching of Hinduism, she asked Claudia to send her as many books as she could find on the subject, and everything she read tended to make her still further at variance with Clement's beliefs. For him individualism was everything, and religion was a mutual relationship between one's God and oneself. That individual sense was just what she was striving to escape; the fact that she mattered so much to herself was responsible for most of her pain. She was trying to think that even her baby did not

matter as an individual, and that Adrian did not matter either. She wanted to feel at one with the scheme of things, as she used to feel on those wonderful nights in the old garden of St Frideswide's, when she knew herself to be one with the starlight and the trees.

In these days her mother was more real to her than her father; she dreamed of her constantly, and had an ever-present sense of her nearness. It was as if she said: "Have courage, my daughter, you and I are strangers in this cold north land, but at least we are together." She lived in a world of her own creating, and only realised the facts of her actual environment with an effort. The good people of Graydales welcomed her silence as much less aggressive than her speech; they considered that she must still be feeling the loss of her baby, and tried in many little unobtrusive ways to show their sympathy. But Hasil was beyond the reach of sympathy. Her ways could never be their ways, and life was getting to be an *ugly* thing, full of discord and dissension. She thought, as she had so often thought, of the lesson Oxford had taught of the need of beauty in all things. She realised that there was beauty in Clement's life, and beauty, no doubt, in Mrs Paterson's, and all the other grey-brown peoples', but since she could not see it, it did not exist for her. She saw now that she had no right to marry Clement, loving another man with all her heart.

Though she could not repair the harm she had done, she could at least refrain from more, and be reconciled anew with the beauty and the truth of things. It was no use to struggle any longer. She was the child of Geoffrey Lathom and one Jasoda, and she must pay the

price. Every night as she lay down to sleep, she murmured for her evening prayer :

“ Nay, but as when one layeth
His worn-out robes away,
And, taking new ones, sayeth :
‘ These will I wear to-day ! ’
So putteth by the Spirit
Lightly its garb of flesh,
And passeth to inherit
A residence afresh.”

CHAPTER XXX

. . . DAWN at last ! Though it was an August morning, rain had fallen in the night, and Hasil had been afraid it would be a grey daybreak. The smell of the wet earth from the garden thrilled in her veins, and the sun coloured every raindrop on the flowers and shrubs to a jewel. She could not help thinking of that glorious wet morning after the Temptation in "Paradise Regained," and she felt the same joy she had always felt in the line, "came forth with pilgrim steps in amice grey."

She dressed quietly, careful not to wake Clement, asleep in the room opposite. A strange gladness dominated her—a sense of expectancy, almost, as if someone she loved very dearly were waiting for her a little way off. She sat down to write a message to Clement. It was very hard to know what to say, because even if he were to know everything that was in her mind, he would never understand. She was more sure than she had ever been in her life that she was doing the only right thing that remained, but Clement would think it horrible and a great sin. It was better not to hurt him.

"CLEMENT DEAR,—It is such a lovely morning that I have gone for a swim. Don't be anxious about me—I know it will do me more good than anything in the world.

"YOUR LOVING WIFE."

She dared not speak more plainly for his own sake. But to Claudia, the friend who had never failed her, she would risk a message from her heart. In her thin leather copy of the *Bhagavad-Gîtâ*, which had been Claudia's gift, she underlined four of the most beautiful lines in the poem, pencilled her initials very faintly in the margin, and laid the marker at the page.

" Never the Spirit was born ; the Spirit shall cease to be never !
Never was time it was not—End and Beginning are dreams !
Birthless and deathless and changeless remaineth the Spirit for
ever :
Death hath not touched it at all, dead tho' the house of it
seems ! "

If she knew Claudia as she thought she did, that message could tell her everything—and the fact that she, Hasil, had wanted her to understand would heal all the wounds she had inflicted in the past on her love.

When she had made the book into a tiny parcel, she was quite ready. She turned for a last look at the grand old mountains—she could face them now. Then she tiptoed very gently down the stairs and let herself out, slipping the book for Claudia into the pillar-box just outside the gate. Her senses seemed intensely alive to the colour in things. She thought she had never noticed before what a golden month August was for flowers. Toadflax and lady's slipper, sow-thistle, ragwort and vetch—they all bore witness to the summer's wealth.

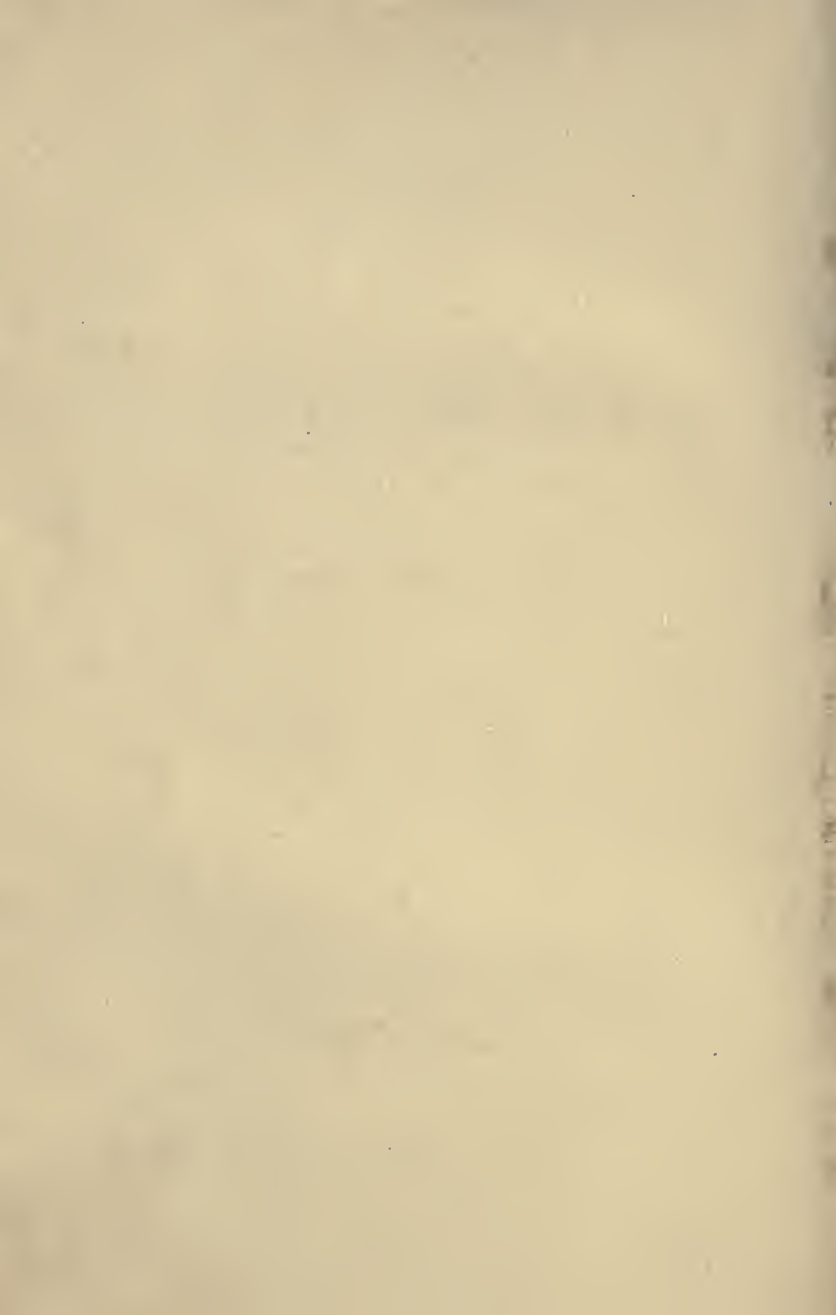
And down by the sea the beauty of the morning was at its highest. The sky was like a valley in spring—soft primrose colour and the blue of hyacinths, deepening on the far horizon to crocus and violet, the foreground rose and green, like Rest-Harrow. Low down on the

skyline the Isle of Man lay like a great sea-beast wallowing in prehistoric mire—to right and left the coast flung out graceful arms, as to a lover. There are no breakwaters at this spot, nothing but a stretch of sandy beach as far as eye can see, peopled generally by sandpipers and seagulls, who haunt the water's edge in search of booty from the wrecks.

The sea was as clear as crystal—"translucent," as Hasil loved it best. The little waves fell over one another innocently enough in their race for the shore, but a little way beyond the bay there were white horses prancing, and a boisterous wind told of a big sea running. She thought that she need not fear for the success of her high adventure. The currents were very dangerous all round that part of the coast, and nobody would suspect anything but that she had swum out too far, and been carried out of her course.

She felt happy, even triumphant; she was losing already the overburdening sense of identity. That sky of spring flowers mattered more to her than Hasil Lathom. . . .

She plunged in, and struck out strongly for the open sea. . . . It seemed to her that the air was full of voices, and that she could distinguish her mother's and her little son's; but that was strange, since she had never heard them. . . . Perhaps it was herself talking. . . . Nearer and nearer to the bank of violets—their fragrance reached her now. . . . She was very tired. It would be good to lie down among them, and sleep. . . .



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